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## VU Objects and their Stories

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# VU Objects and their Stories

140 years of heritage at [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#)

Ab Flipse & Liselotte Neervoort





**VU** *Objects and their Stories*





# VU Objects and their Stories

140 Years of Heritage at [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#)

**Ab Flipse & Liselotte Neervoort**

## Colophon

This publication appears on the occasion of the 140th anniversary of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2020-21 and is published by CLUE<sup>+</sup>: Research Institute for Culture, Cognition, History and Heritage of VU Amsterdam.

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Photo on page 23 left: Collection gemeentearchief Weesp.

Photo on page 23 right: Collection Margreet Ridderbos.

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# Introduction

## Objects and Stories about 140 years of History of VU Amsterdam

*Ab Flipse and Liselotte Neervoort*

In the 2020-21 academic year, two important commemorative events of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam coincided. Not only was the university celebrating its 140th anniversary, but this anniversary year was also proclaimed the 'Kuyper Year', as 8 November 2020 marked the centenary of the death of Abraham Kuyper, the principal founder of the university. A host of activities and commemorations were planned to celebrate the anniversary and to highlight and reflect on the historical and contemporary significance of Kuyper. One of the planned activities was the 'VU Objects and their Stories' exhibition, which was to focus on the heritage of VU Amsterdam, compiled by the authors of this book, Ab Flipse, university historian, and Liselotte Neervoort, curator of academic heritage.

But 2020-21 was also the academic year in which the measures taken in response to the coronavirus pandemic drastically reduced the possibilities for activities on the campus. Teaching and other activities were only possible on a small scale, or conducted solely online. The same went for many of the anniversary activities. And the plans for the exhibition also had to be revised: it was decided to organise the exhibition online. It was assigned space on the commemorative website 'Geheugen van de VU' [Memory of the VU] and over the course of the academic year new illustrations of objects and the accompanying blogs were continuously published online.

Of course, it was a pity that precisely this exhibition, which aimed to showcase the material VU heritage, could only be 'visited' through a screen. But the online presentation also had an advantage: it enabled us to show all the objects and accompanying stories one by one, and thus to give special attention to each of

them. The many positive responses we received inspired us to also incorporate the exhibition in this publication, which is appearing in both Dutch and English. This allows a less ephemeral form of commemoration. Moreover, in the summer of 2021 it proved possible to organise a physical exhibition after all, in the new heritage display case on the first floor of the VU Main Building.



▲ Bust of Abraham Kuyper in front of the Aula at VU Amsterdam.



▲ Heritage display case on the first floor of the VU Main Building, containing the exhibition 'VU objects and their stories', July 2021.

## VU heritage and history

The idea behind the exhibition is to use the preserved heritage to present the full range of VU Amsterdam's history and moreover to do this in a broad manner, thus creating a kaleidoscopic picture of its history. For each five-year period, we have selected one object that is characteristic of this period because it originates from this era or because it is associated with an important event that took place then. This has resulted in 28 chapters, one for each 'lustrum'. The heritage is the material reflection of various

roles played by the university, and in choosing objects and the accompanying stories we have tried to do justice to the diversity of academic life. Hence, we have highlighted core tasks such as research and education in various faculties, academic rituals, spatial changes, an exceptional period such as the Second World War, student life, and all kinds of academic and social activities.

We have taken a broad approach to the term 'object'. In addition to objects in the stricter sense, we have also selected books, photos of things like VU buildings (both historical and contemporary), films and even software. What they all have in common is that they are concrete remnants of our past, forming a direct link with the



people who created them, used them, cherished them or admired them. In a special way, these concrete items give us access to the way university life took shape in the past: what it looked like, how people thought and what choices they made. By using the heritage as a bridge between past and present, we can also reflect on how the past continues to affect the present day.

Each chapter presents the object and its special qualities, and tells the story behind it. Most of the background texts have been written by us. However, we also invited a large number of guest authors within VU Amsterdam to reflect on an object we had chosen, or on a related theme (and sometimes also to provide historical backgrounds). Texts written by guest authors are clearly identified as such at the top of the texts, with brief biographical notes given at the end. The reflective texts are printed on a blue background.

Like other universities, VU Amsterdam has undergone huge growth in the 20th and 21st centuries. Beginning as a small community of professors and students, it has transformed into a complex large-scale organisation with many faculties and departments. The objects from the VU collections mirror this transformation. VU Amsterdam was founded by the Reformed (*gereformeerd*, orthodox Protestant) community in the Netherlands and maintained close contacts with this 'rank and file' for a long time – creating societal roots that, at the time, clearly distinguished VU Amsterdam from other universities. In the first fifty years, its small-scale but formal university life took place mostly in the university building on the Keizersgracht, which accommodated the senate hall, lecture theatres, the administrative department and the library, and where some of the students resided on an intramural basis.

Initially the university had only three faculties: Theology, Law and Arts. But the Faculty of Medicine commenced on a small scale in 1907, followed by a Faculty of Science in 1930. This also marked the start of a spatial expansion through the city, with the construction of a clinic and laboratories in Amsterdam

South. More faculties and new disciplines followed after the Second World War with a dramatic growth starting in the 1960s, accompanied by the relocation to a new campus in the Amsterdam suburb of Buitenveldert and a change in the original identity of the university. Today, VU Amsterdam has almost 30,000 students and 4,000 employees and is one of the more diverse universities in the Netherlands.

## The collections

The exhibition draws mainly on the collections curated by the University Library under the name 'VU Heritage & Collections'. This includes the following: Academic Heritage, HDC | Protestant Heritage, Manuscripts & Early Printed Books, the Art Collection, and Maps & Atlases. These collections have highly diverse functions. They are used for teaching and research by academics both within and outside VU Amsterdam, while also being important in terms of academic history and university history because they cast light on the historical development of scholarship and science – of entire disciplines, but also of specific research and teaching as conducted at VU Amsterdam.



▲ Bust of Abraham Kuyper with the World War II Memorial in the background (see pages 52-55).

Finally, the collections also have a public function. Through presentations and exhibitions, they can build a bridge between the university and the world at large, between the present and the past. By cherishing, displaying and examining the objects and their stories which remind us of the past, we show where we come from and also where we stand today. As such, exhibitions can also serve as starting point for discussions about current issues, with which the collections can confront us in various ways. What choices and decisions were made in the past – both in a general sense and specifically at VU Amsterdam – with regard to education and research, the relationship between science and religion, identity, gender equality, inclusivity, colonialism and sustainability? And how can we, today, relate to this past?

In offering such a variety of facets and interfaces while being collectively curated, these collections make a whole which is more than its parts. Furthermore, as this book shows, they all relate to a greater or lesser degree to the history of VU Amsterdam. Many personal archives from the HDC | Protestant Heritage collection (the collection of the HDC Centre for Religious History (1800-today), founded in 1971) are also relevant to the history of VU Amsterdam, partly because it includes most of the professorial archives from the early days of the university. This applies, for instance, to the archives of the theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, the philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, as well as scientists such as the physicist Gerard Sizoo and the biologist Jan Lever. Professorial portraits form part of the Academic Heritage collection, as does Dooyeweerd's academic gown, for instance. Research and education heritage, such as instruments and lecture notes, are also curated in Academic Heritage, while book collections were sometimes donated to the library by retired professors. The Art collection was acquired gradually, sometimes with a view to specific events such as an anniversary or a collaboration with academics. A good example of this latter category is the photo series DOUBLE DUTCH, created in collaboration with the Netherlands Twin Register at VU Amsterdam in 2016.



▲ Archival cellar with the collections 'HDC | Protestants Heritage'.

Since the exhibition also devotes attention to recent VU Amsterdam history, we have included some objects that do not (yet) form part of the heritage collections, but which do relate to the history of the university or have a place on the campus. Examples here include (stories about) the VU Sports Centre and the Green Office tap water point. As part of the reflective process, we invite the reader to actively engage with the VU heritage and



to join us in reflecting on the heritage of the future – which, after all, is being created today.

We extend our warm thanks to the Kuyper Year steering committee; VUvereniging; Stichting Dr Abraham Kuyperfonds; to CLUE+: Research Institute for Culture, Cognition, History and Heritage; and to the University Library of VU Amsterdam – all of whom made this project possible. We would also like to thank the guest authors who at our request, and with creative energy, recorded their reflections or provided historical backgrounds. Mariska Castelijns, who was involved in the preparations as a student assistant, Joost van Ommen, who provided the online support, and Bert Brouwenstijn of CLUE+, who handled the design of this volume, all made very valuable contributions. The

online exhibition remains accessible at GeheugenvandeVU (under the ‘Dossiers’ <https://www.geheugenvandevu.nl/dossiers/vu-voorwerpen-en-hun-verhalen>), along with literature references and links to background information.

*Amsterdam, June 2021*



▲ Forum Hall with professorial portraits.



## 1880-1885 | Portrait of Abraham Kuyper

The painted portrait of Abraham Kuyper dates from 1907, but is the most fitting opening of this series. Kuyper was the chief founding father of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and in 1880 became its first Rector Magnificus. He was to leave his mark on the university's course in the first decades of its existence. How does the current Rector Magnificus, Vinod Subramaniam, feel about Kuyper and his portrait?

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was established on 20 October 1880 as a private university at the behest of Abraham Kuyper. *Vrij* or 'Free' from government influence, and independent from the Dutch (mainstream) Reformed Church, the university was grounded firmly in society thanks to the connection with its Reformed benefactors; it sought to link science and scholarship to the Christian faith.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was a polymath with a vision. He started off as a Reformed minister, founded his own newspaper in 1872 (*De Standaard* [The Standard]), was elected a Member of Parliament in 1874, and in 1879 founded the first political party of the Netherlands (the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij [Anti-Revolutionary Party], ARP). Furthermore, he founded a university in 1880. He led a schism from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1886, which prompted the formation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. This led to a Reformed subculture (or pillar) with its own church, weekly and daily papers, university, and political party. Kuyper served as VU Amsterdam's first Rector and was made a Professor of Theology, also lecturing on Dutch and teaching some other courses in the Faculty of Arts. He ceased his daily involvement in his university when he was appointed Prime Minister in 1901.

This painted portrait displays a thoughtful and almost monumental Kuyper in his study. It was presented to him for his 70th birthday by a delegation from the Vereeniging van Christelijke Onderwijzers en Onderwijzeressen in Nederland en Overzeesche Bezittingen [Association of Christian School Teachers in the Netherlands and Overseas Territories] as a token of gratitude for his efforts and achievements for private

(denominational) education. The artist is Hendrik Haverman (1857-1928), who was an accomplished painter of portraits in a style rather more traditional than the impressionist Hague School that was popular at the time. It is particularly remarkable how Kuyper's face lights up from the dark background. The portrait adorned Kuyper's own study until his death. His heirs presented it to VU Amsterdam in 1921, making it the first painting in the collection of professorial portraits, which now comprises nearly 120 objects. The portrait used to adorn the Senate Hall in the University Building at Keizersgracht for a long time. It was first included in the Aula's portrait gallery following the relocation to De Boelelaan, after which it ended up in the Forum Hall.

### Kuyper and his portrait: an impression

Vinod Subramaniam

*My illustrious predecessor cuts an imposing, if somewhat forbidding, figure in this portrait, befitting his stature as visionary founder of a number of institutions: a newspaper, political party, church, university. That last has grown into the Vrije Universiteit of today, an institution that we can be proud of. I only hope that the current rector looks a wee bit more approachable to his colleagues and students, if not as 'monumental'.*

Vinod Subramaniam, Rector Magnificus 2015-2021



▲ Hendrik J. Haverman, *Abraham Kuyper*, 1906, Oil on canvas, 119 x 83 cm.





▲ University Building Keizersgracht 162, around 1940, Black-and-white photograph.

For a long time, the building at Keizersgracht 162 and neighbouring buildings were the focal point of university life. Until the move to the new campus in 1966, the faculties of Theology, Law and Arts, the university administration and the university library were all housed here. But a university building, and especially the library, is more than just a place to work and study. This was true back then, and it's certainly still true today. Harm Derks of the University Library explains how they cultivate the right atmosphere on the campus nowadays.

### The old university building

In the first few years of its existence, VU Amsterdam did not have its own accommodation. In December 1883, the board of the university, the directors of the 'Vereeniging voor Hooger Onderwijs op Gereformeerden Grondslag' [Association for Higher Education on Reformed Principles] (now: VUvereniging), took action with the purchase of the 1615 canal house for 41,000 guilders. After a thorough renovation, the building housed its initial classes on 1 February 1884. A new façade was erected, which henceforth displayed the text 'Vrije Universiteit' and 'Anno 1884'. Further confirmation of its use as a university building was provided by a wooden emblem with the VU Amsterdam seal, the 'Virgin in the Garden', placed over the entrance. The topmost floor lodged students in what was called the Hospitium.

Plenty of space was available back then, as there were very few students at VU Amsterdam during its early days (five in 1880 and 125 around 1900). However, as the university saw strong growth at the start of the 20th century, the previously acquired premises at Nr 164 were integrated with Nr 162 in 1923. Internal renovation resulted in a shared attic, among other things, for the library. The next purchase was Nr 166 in 1930. At that point, VU Amsterdam was home to around 500 students (still few when compared with the 2,200 students at the University of Amsterdam). The historical buildings became increasingly cramped as the student numbers almost exceeded the capacity of the narrow staircases.

Founded in 1930, the Faculty of Sciences had a new laboratory built at De Lairesestraat, in the south of Amsterdam. Further premises across the city were acquired for other new programmes, including at Koningslaan and Prins Hendriklaan. At the same time, the main building continued to be expanded: the premises at Nr 160 were acquired in 1954 to increase the size of the library. Nr 166 underwent a thorough renovation and gained two additional floors in this year as well. Internal corridors connected all of the premises. The university also commissioned the neighbouring premises at Nrs 158 and 168 in 1962.

The university devised a plan to move an increasing number of departments to its new campus in Buitenveldert from the 1950s. It eventually sold the Keizersgracht premises in 1966. The range of Hospitiums that served as student accommodation migrated to the Uilenstede student centre in Amstelveen. It was not until in the 1990s that all faculties and departments were gathered around the new campus.

Heritage that reminds us of the old university locations is curated by the University Library, and some of this heritage has found a new permanent place on the campus. The most visible item is the emblem with the university seal, which following the relocation was incorporated in the lectern at the front of the Aula. But the heritage elements remind us of the past in other places, too, such as the library – and in this way they help to create an academic working environment, a sense of connection with the university and can serve to link the past with contemporary research and teaching.

## Study places, meeting spots

*Harm Derks*

The current University Library – housed on all floors of the B Tower of the Main Building and in VUmc – is not only a place where books, collections and archives are consulted and borrowed: it offers many study places as well. The University Library is also co-responsible for study places at other locations on the campus, together with other service departments and in co-creation with students.

The University Library aims to create a lively atmosphere both on the campus and online, a place where academic research is visible and tangible, where you can find what you're looking for, or encounter what you didn't yet know existed. A place everyone likes to come in order to share knowledge, and where everyone can rest assured that research results are managed well, stored safely and made readily accessible and easy to find. A place where you can feel the buzz of the university. Where everyone feels at home. The university's heart beats in the library: this is where we go for inspiration, to build on what already exists and to explore how even more can be created out of this.

Driven by these goals, in recent years we have set up a research room for classical languages, with books literally close at hand, and the second floor of the Main Building has been furnished as a 'living room' with a 'Plant Hotel', sleeping pods, art and heritage – a place where in-depth activities are organised, and also a venue for silent discos arranged for and by students.

One project for the future is *Omboeken* ('Re-booking'): students like to surround themselves physically with books – but our books are shelved in stores and many of them are never lent out, or only very rarely. We are assessing which books are no longer relevant in terms of content as they are now permanently available in digital form or outdated. This part of the collection, which no longer offers added value in terms of content (while remaining available elsewhere in

the Netherlands), will then be removed from the stores and used to create a special atmosphere for the study rooms and meeting spots: the books will be used as building blocks or as raw material for book-based artworks, for furniture or as inspiring sound insulation.

We will also start deploying books as a source of inspiration, setting up open bookshelves based on themes that can offer our users different perspectives, in collaboration with partners such as VU Pride, Black Archives, The Green Office and A Broader Mind. In this way we aim not only to provide in-depth opportunities but also to create connections and promote spontaneous encounters.

*Harm Derks is the Manager of Library Services.*





▲ Wooden shield with the emblem of 'the virgin in the garden' above the entrance at the Keizersgracht 162.

▼ Interior of the University Library, VU Main Building, second floor, 2021.





▲ The senate of the VU-corps of 1902, Black-and-white photograph.



In 1880 Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam started with just five students. This number grew in the next few years, but it remained a very select group throughout the 19th century. The students however wasted no time starting a student society, 'Oratorische Vereeniging Da Costa' [Oratorical Society Da Costa], soon renamed Soli Deo Gloria. This 1902 photo is one of the collection's first featuring a student association. It is also the start of a long tradition: the senate photographed in front of their flag. Maarten J. Aalders tells the story behind the photo. Danny Soekarnsingh and Parwana Rezai contrast this with the story of Family of Academic Minds (FAM), an association that was founded very recently.

### The senate of 1902

*Maarten J. Aalders*

Young people are often the starting point for change processes or even revolutions. The same applied to some followers of Abraham Kuyper. This picture of the student senate dates from 1902. The VU-Corps student society had emerged from years of turbulence. Since 1896, there had been two student societies: the more conservative 'Gereformeerde Studentenbond' [Reformed Student Union] and the more progressive 'Corps van Studenten aan de VU' [Society of Students at VU Amsterdam]. Their key difference concerned the question to what extent members were supposed to endorse 'Reformed principles'. A compromise was reached in 1901 and the student schism was mended. Close observation of this picture reveals new fault lines appearing, however.

Jan Geelkerken (a member of the fraternity I.V.M.B.O., founded in 1891) is seated to the far left. He had explicit opinions, was financially independent and entered into a dispute with the Reformed Synod on the nature of Scriptural authority in the 1920s. Being suspended as a minister in 1926, he was subsequently deposed. He appears next to his close friend Jan Netelenbos (a member of Demosthenes, the oldest fraternity, founded in 1882), who also had a conflict with the church. Because of his equally deviant view of Scriptural authority, he was deposed as a minister in 1920. Third to the left is the good-humoured J.A. de Wilde (member of the fraternity F.O.R.V.M.,

founded 1894). Throughout his life, he was a loyal member of the Reformed Churches and the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), which he served as a Minister twice.

He is adjacent to Herman Rutgers (also a member of I.V.M.B.O.), who dedicated his life to the Nederlandsche Christen Studenten Vereniging [Dutch Christian Student Association]. While the Reformed Synod was later to disapprove of such membership, it did not do so at this time. Herman Rutgers himself indeed preferred harmony to conflict, unlike Geelkerken and Netelenbos. To the far right is Aart van Schelven. He renounced his ARP membership in the 1930s and joined the National Front for some of the War years. As a result, VU Amsterdam dismissed him as Professor of History after the War. The flag-bearer is his brother Arnout J. van Schelven, who is not known to have any 'atrocities' to his name (and who has not merited an entry in the Dutch Biography Portal).

*Maarten J. Aalders is a church historian. His publications include a biography of J. Geelkerken.*

## **F.A.M. Family of Academic Minds: in 2019...**

*Danny Soekarnsingh*

In 2019 FAM started at VU Amsterdam with just five students. The number of students, however humble and small, grew rapidly because of an unapologetic vision. The vision to manifest a platform in which the world could call FAM their home. Accordingly, the number of students grew and with that a consortium of perspectives, methods and lived experiences became a tight knit network of visionaries. To house the world for the betterment of academia, post academia and in macro the world requires a foundation of acceptance, respect, mutuality and transparency. Therefore starting from scratch gave us the opportunity to totally reimagine what a student organization can be today and the potential to become in the future. To realize young people are the seeds that will be the fruit-bearing trees of the future, allows us to harness our diversity in order to provide the fertile ground which FAM pleads to offer students from all over the world. To become informed and formed by transcending borders is the adaptivity, resilience and excellence that FAM is synonymous with.

## **.. and in 2021**

*Parwana Rezai*

Two years later now, FAM is holding tight to the same vision that led to its growth. The community which started with just five students now is a fully functional established student association with a board, several committees and over one hundred members, of which students range from first generation students to students from bi-cultural backgrounds and more. While we pride ourselves on the level of diversity and inclusion we uphold in our representation and at every step we take, we are aware that our work is not complete yet. Rather, we believe that this fertile ground is just starting to bloom with flowers of inspiration: it is the beginning of the necessary, fundamental change that will be brought.

The image of the senate of the VU student organization in 1902 depicts what was deemed revolutionary for that time period. Looking back at this image now, many of us could be alarmed to see the faces of only white men in formal attire upholding the patriarchal image. Therefore, both the picture of VU's 1902 student association and FAM's is a reminder that although it is definitely good to appreciate progress made in intervening years, we should remember that no matter how revolutionary a certain image seems to be, progress should be the catalyst for more.

*Danny Soekarnsingh is the co-founder and Parwana Rezai is the current vice president of FAM.*



▲ University Building at Keizersgracht 162 with student residents, 1935-1940.



▲ Conversation room of the Hospitium, Keizersgracht, 1938.



▲ Study hall in the library, Keizersgracht, 1955.



Ever since 1930, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has regularly presented honorary doctorates to persons with exceptional achievements. Abraham Kuyper himself received a similar distinction from Princeton University in 1898. The academic cape he was presented with here is now in the VU Collection. How did Kuyper react to this? And how do we see this nowadays? George Harinck explains the history and Kathleen Ferrier reflects on this event from today's perspective.

### Kuyper, the cape and Princeton

*George Harinck*

Honorary doctorates are awarded by universities to persons who have made an extraordinary contribution towards science or society. As a token, many honorary doctors receive a degree certificate as well as a cape or kappa to wear over their academic gown. Among the hundreds of professors with their black gowns, as can for example be seen at the Dies Natalis of VU Amsterdam, only a few in the procession usually wear such a mark of distinction. This tradition entered the Netherlands from the English-speaking world, where the cape became popular around the late-nineteenth century. At Utrecht University, for example, it was introduced shortly after its 300th anniversary in 1936.

VU Amsterdam did not yet observe this usage in 1930, when it awarded honorary doctorates for the first time. However, it was certainly aware of this phenomenon of the cape as a mark of distinction for honorary doctors. In October 1898, Professor Abraham Kuyper had received such a cape when being awarded his honorary doctorate in Law at Princeton University. As he believed the cape to be an additional distinction over and above his honorary doctorate, he wrote to his wife: 'They are so enthusiastic now, that the university has decided to name me doctor with the cape. I will be sure to take this ornament with me.' He used to be the sole honorary doctor at VU Amsterdam for a long time. While he even had multiple honorary doctorates

from abroad, he wore the Princeton cape during academic ceremonies. The student H. Kaajan described his impressions on the occasion of the 1899 Dies Natalis-celebration: 'At the front was the beadle, bearing the university sceptre and wearing a gown, who struck a dashing pose. Behind him was Dr A. Kuyper in a splendid black gown, over which he wore a cape that was purple and orange in parts. With his clothes and the cap on his head, he had the semblance of a powerful church leader. He was followed by all the other professors in black caps and gowns.'

VU Amsterdam regarded this colourful connection with academia abroad as a sign that the university's existence went beyond the domestic context alongside the state universities. Its explicitly Christian principles also made a recognisable contribution to the practice of science across the globe.

VU Amsterdam awards its own honorary doctorates to persons of exceptional distinction in science, politics or culture, including Martin Luther King in 1965 and the astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti in 2018.

*George Harinck is Professor in the History of Neo-Calvinism at the Faculty of Humanities (VU) and at the Theological University in Kampen.*



▲ The cape Abraham Kuyper received from Princeton University on the occasion of his honorary doctorate in 1898.

## A reflection prompted by Kuyper's cape

*Kathleen Ferrier*

That is how it goes with people who are prepared to lead the way: even before the general community has really understood what's going on, they've already taken another step. Sometimes even in very physical terms. That's how it was with Abraham Kuyper.

While VU Amsterdam itself didn't grant any honorary doctorates until 1930, Abraham Kuyper himself had already received one in 1898: from Princeton University. It's significant that Kuyper was so unfamiliar with the 'honorary doctorate' as a concept, and everything associated with it, that he assumed the accompanying cape was a sort of second distinction. This might seem rather surprising. Although Kuyper seems to me like a man who firmly believed things should be useful, we also know that he was fond of the trappings and rituals of academic life. But apparently he didn't know about this specific tradition.

But in the meantime, he was a person who crossed boundaries and returned with new things. Not only decorations – possibly superfluous in nature – but also new ideas. Years later, VU Amsterdam awarded its own first honorary doctorate. And now, in the Kuyper Year, we can look back on a whole series of honorary doctorates, presented to various impressive personalities. Fearless people who led the way and in doing so made a difference. People like Martin Luther King Jr., Dom Hélder Câmara, Ernesto Cardenal, Karen Armstrong and Yap Thiam Hien.

In his own day, Kuyper was not averse to bringing 'foreign' ideas back to the university. Today, we also know VU Amsterdam as a university that opens its doors wide to students from abroad and its windows to ideas from other countries. And what's more: it's a university that understands that without diversity and inclusion in our country and our world, no true progress is possible. More of the same, remaining stuck in your own 'bubble', this doesn't serve science and doesn't benefit society either.

In this commemorative year, we, the Kuyper Year steering committee, aim to highlight the various aspects of Abraham Kuyper's personality in an honest and fair manner, to reveal his ideas, to show what drove him and why it drove him, back then, in his own age.

In my view, his broad gaze across the dikes and dunes of our small country is something that still characterises VU Amsterdam in its pursuit of international scope and internationalised education. Moreover, this aspiration is clearly not only an ornament for VU Amsterdam, but rather an essential part of its mission, just as Kuyper's cape was for his very first honorary doctorate.

*Kathleen Ferrier is Chair of the Kuyper Year Steering Committee.*



▲ Abraham Kuyper in 1898 wearing the cape, Princeton campus, Black-and-white photograph.



▲ The writer Cornelis Rijnsdorp's cape, which he received from VU Amsterdam in 1965 on the occasion of his honorary doctorate.



## 1900-1905 | Willem Hovy and his Portrait

The VU Collection includes this drawing of Willem Hovy. Hovy was the general manager of the beer brewery and vinegar producer De Gekroonde Valk in Amsterdam, which in its day was the biggest brewery in the Netherlands. As a religiously inspired, socially involved and wealthy entrepreneur he played a major role in the founding of VU Amsterdam. This portrait of Hovy draws our attention to the important role of the committed sponsors and benefactors of the university. Who was Hovy, and was he the only donor? Fred van Lieburg considers these questions.

Willem Hovy (1840-1915) was one of initiators of the 'Vereeniging voor Hooger Onderwijs op Gereformeerden Grondslag' [Association for Higher Education on Reformed Principles] in 1878 and he became chairman of the board of directors. At the creation of the university two years later, he donated no less than 25,000 guilders and he also donated an annual 250 guilders for each professorship.

Hovy was founder and governor of a large number of charity organizations, including in the fields of mission, relief works and prevention of poverty, and he was a member of the Amsterdam city council. He also installed several social policies within his own company, including a pension fund, free Sundays, and extra pay at the birth of a child. He was a deeply religious man, and felt responsible for all those in his care. His contributions to VU Amsterdam suit that image. Even after a conflict around Abraham Kuyper, when Hovy left the board of directors, he kept supporting the university financially.

The collection of portraits of leading VU figures was started in 1921, when VU Amsterdam was gifted the portrait of its founder Abraham Kuyper after his death. A portrait of Hovy wasn't added until 1992. His bust, now situated next to the Aula in the Main Building, arrived even later. The portrait drawing was made by Martha Amalia Voullaire (1856-1932) not long after 1900. Voullaire was a student of Amsterdam-born Jan Pieter Veth, a well-known portrait painter and art critic who also portrayed Kuyper. When Voullaire made this portrait she was the governess of the Hovy family. The soft colours (created with pastel crayons) match

Hovy's pensive attitude and imbue the overall image with a very agreeable presence. The subject's introspective attitude puts the work in Veth's tradition, in which the sitters often do not direct their gaze to the viewer. The portrait was donated to VU Amsterdam by the Hovy family in 1992 and it now hangs in the Forum Hall, together with other founders, rectors and directors.



▲ Martha Amalia Voullaire, *Willem Hovy*, 1902, Pastel crayon on paper, 53 x 40 cm.

## VU Amsterdam and its benefactors

*Fred van Lieburg*

When VU Amsterdam was founded in 1880, this was not exclusively due to the visionary drive of Abraham Kuyper and his circle. It also required money to cover the costs of staff and accommodation. After all, the government was unwilling to contribute anything to this special Christian enterprise. The most generous and hence best-known sponsor was Willem Hovy; but Hovy was far from being the only donor.

Thousands of other donors gave larger or smaller sums to the 'Association for Higher Education on Reformed Principles'. This association comprised members and benefactors; members were required to pay at least 25 guilders annually or to make a one-time payment of 500 guilders. All others who made any kind of contribution were registered as benefactors. When the Association published its list of donors in the summer of 1881, it contained 490 members and 1770 benefactors. Among the members on the list were not only Hovy and of course Kuyper himself, but a wide range of more or less prosperous professors and pastors. These included the Reformed village pastor C.L.D. van Coeverden Adriani, founder of a capital fund at VU Amsterdam that is still in existence today.

The large group of benefactors comprised teachers, civil servants and entrepreneurs, and to a far lesser extent wage-

earners, for whom even a nickel tended to be too high a price. Kuyper initially referred to these people as 'silent citizens', and later changed this to the catchy term *kleine luyden*, literally 'small folks'. He was not referring to the poor here, but rather to common people who made bold to resist the trend to liberalism and instead take a Calvinist approach to life in both the personal and public spheres. In the period 1900-1905 the number of VU donors passed the ten-thousand mark.

It's worth noting that it was not only the Reformed *mannenbroeders* or 'brethren' who were willing to express their appreciation of VU Amsterdam in financial terms. There were many women among the donors: even right at the start, twenty members and 190 benefactors were female. Aristocratic ladies and rich widows, but also religiously committed housewives and unmarried women. This was long before the VU women organised themselves in 1932, launching the famous collecting tin.

Just to clear up any possible misunderstanding: Martha Amalia Voullaire, who worked for Willem Hovy and who drew the portrait of the great philanthropist, was not a donor to VU Amsterdam.

*Fred van Lieburg is Professor of Religious History at the Faculty of Humanities and Chair of the VU Historical Committee.*





▲ Frans Nicolaas van der Muelen (1847-1911) and his wife Willemina Vastwijk (1846-1922). Van der Muelen was a 'commissionaire in securities' and in 1879 donated a substantial sum to the newly established VUvereniging. In the yearbooks he was therefore not only mentioned in the list of members, but also in the 'Names list of the Founders of the Vrije Universiteit'. The couple lived in Weesp and remained childless. They were active in all kinds of areas of 'Christian philanthropy'. In 1881, the banker financed the purchase of land for a Christian School (School met de Bijbel) and his widow left bequests to the Reformed Church and to the Christian nursery school. The 'Van der Muelen-Vastwijk School' still exists in Weesp.



▲ Geeske Kruil (1840-1929), widow of Harm Ridderbos (1843-1901), with her grandsons Herman Nicolaas, Nicolaas Herman and Simon Jan. Harm was a shopkeeper in Bedum in Groningen and for many years an elder in the Reformed Church and a member of the local poverty relief council. From 1890 onwards, he was a benefactor of the VUvereniging and after his death Geeske took over his role. She was an erudite woman. Her sons Siemon and Jan studied and obtained their PhD at VU Amsterdam and became teacher at the Reformed Gymnasium in Amsterdam and a professor at the Theological School in Kampen, respectively. The boys in the photo also became well-known figures in the Reformed world. The current VUvereniging also owes a lot to Geeske's great-granddaughter Gezina Johanna Ridderbos (1940), who worked for many years at the VU student chaplaincy and served as a volunteer at the Historical Documentation Center.





▲ A. Greiner's Studio, Ms S.L. 't Hooft, Amsterdam, c. 1905, Black-and-white photograph.

This black-and-white picture from about 1905 shows the first female student at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Suze 't Hooft, who enrolled in the Faculty of Law in 1905. For many years, the university trailed others in numbers of female students and professors. Nowadays, there are more female than male students, and with a 27% of female professors, VU Amsterdam is just above the average of Dutch universities. But there is still a way to go, argues gender network WO&MEN@VU.

This photograph was most likely taken by Fidel Greiner (1865-1938), who succeeded his father in the renowned photography studio Albert Greiner at Nieuwendijk 89 in Amsterdam. Among other things, Albert Greiner from South Germany served as court photographer for King William III and acquired fame with his special technique to make durable visiting cards which included a portrait picture. His wide range of clients comprised actors and artists, while he also made photos of Amsterdam cityscapes.

Segrina Luiksje 't Hooft (1883-1921) grew up in a well-off Reformed environment. Her father was a member of the Dutch Senate for Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party. He had asked the then Rector of VU Amsterdam whether his daughter could enrol in the university. The university senate consulted on the matter, after which two professors voted against and nine in favour of her admission. As a result, 't Hooft enrolled as a student and was also admitted to a student society following a well-frequented society meeting, joining the fraternity I.V.M.B.O.

With Suze 't Hooft enrolling in 1905 as its first female student, VU Amsterdam was slow to follow national developments. Aletta Jacobs had been the first female student at the University of Groningen in 1871. Over the following decades, female students became increasingly common at most universities, even though their numbers remained limited. To VU Amsterdam, however, it was quite a surprise in 1905. It had only been seven years since theologian G.H.J.W.J. Geesink uttered these legendary words: 'It is my devout desire that the Vrije Universiteit should always refrain from participating in such a defeminisation of women;

that it should never be guilty of the malady for women to feel as though they are intellectually men.'

For many subsequent years few women were to follow Suze 't Hooft in studying at VU Amsterdam. The next woman enrolled in 1917, succeeded by two in the year after. Women enrolled almost every year in increasing numbers as of the 1920s. In response, two sororities were founded: Pallas and Phoinix. Women comprised 10% of new enrolment at VU Amsterdam by 1939. This growth continued after the War. Student societies were segregated in 1946, marked by the foundation of the women-only student association V.V.S.V.U.

In 1937 both Gezina van der Molen and Fenna Lindeboom obtained their PhD from the law faculty. Van der Molen later also became the first female professor when she was appointed extraordinary professor in 1949, and full professor of International Law in 1958. For a long time she was one of the few women in high positions at the university.

## Women at VU Amsterdam, present day

*Saskia van der Vies and Marieke de Hoorn*

Fortunately, times have changed, partly as a result of better recruitment and advancement, for example by the start of the Fenna Diemer-Lindeboom chairs, only for women. There are nowadays more female than male students at VU Amsterdam and at Dutch universities in general. With regard to higher positions including professorial chair, however, there remains scope for improvement. A range of organizations and networks is dedicated to this cause, including Athena's Angels nationwide, and WO&MEN@VU. The latter works to promote gender equality and an inclusive VU community by addressing implicit and explicit forms of gender bias. By creating awareness and organising events, the network contributes to a VU community where everyone can be themselves, feel welcome and flourish. Gender equality and overall diversity are in fact main focus areas at VU Amsterdam.

*Saskia van der Vies is chair of the WO&MEN@VU network, and Professor of Biochemistry at Amsterdam UMC. Marieke de Hoorn is board member of the WO&MEN@VU network and Assistant Professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law.*



▲ Poster of the exhibition 'How to portray a professor' by the University Library and WO&MEN@VU, 2020.





▲ Dies Natalis celebration by the Association of Female Students at the Vrije Universiteit (V.V.S.V.U.), 1947.  
Seated behind the table to the right is Mrs. M.J. Oranje-van der Meulen, honorary member.

## 1910-1915 | The Commemorative Tile of the Valerius Clinic

Ever since the founding of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1880 there was a desire to set up the university's own Faculty of Medicine so as to train 'Christian doctors'. Officially, the medical faculty was not founded until 1950, but its history actually goes back much further. This otherwise unknown wall tile reveals a piece of this history. And for Abel Thijs, internist at Amsterdam UMC, it gets him thinking about connections: between body and soul, personal belief and healthcare, the present and the future.

### From professor to hospital, and the value of a tile

This wall tile is one of the few physical objects that evoke the turbulent prehistory of the medical faculty at VU Amsterdam. It depicts the entrance of the Valerius Clinic and states the date of the clinic's opening: 3 November 1910. The entrance seems to match a photograph from ca. 1935, before the major rebuilding work in 1937-1941. Tiles such as this were often made to mark a jubilee or commemoration. And both the clinic's first fifty and hundred years were celebrated in grand style. However, there is nothing to definitely connect one of these two occasions to the object at hand. In 2017, following much controversy, the building was demolished, but unfortunately by then it was no longer customary to make such tiles. The tile might also have been produced to mark the reconstruction in 1937, when the characteristic little towers disappeared and the building gained a new, equally characteristic facade.

The first Professor of Medicine was appointed as early as 1907: Leendert Bouman, a psychiatrist. The university also collaborated intensively with the 'Association for Christian Care for the Insane and Nervous Disorder Patients'. In 1910, this led to the creation of the Valerius Clinic at the Valeriusplein, a square in Amsterdam-South, where Bouman became medical director. In 1919 a second professor was appointed: Frits Buytendijk, who headed the Physiological Laboratory, also accommodated on Valeriusplein. With three professors the department could have gained the status of an independent faculty, but this this did not happen for

another three decades; Buytendijk departed in 1924, and in 1925, Bouman was appointed professor in Utrecht, after which he was only able to devote a few hours a week to VU Amsterdam. His successor Lammert van der Horst took up work as a psychiatrist at the Valerius Clinic in 1924, and was then appointed professor at VU Amsterdam in 1928.

VU Amsterdam also trained medical students, despite not having a complete medical faculty. Part of the programme, indeed a large part, was provided at the University of Amsterdam. In 1950, a true medical faculty was finally founded and this development was consolidated with the construction of the VU Academic Hospital, in Buitenveldert, which officially opened in 1966. The same site is still home to Amsterdam UMC, VUmc location.





▲ Wall tile with image of the Valerius Clinic, creator unknown, undated, 15 x 15 cm.

## Connectivity: reflections on a little wall tile

Abel Thijs

We do not know the origin of this tile, nor why it was made. Not only about the past of this tile, but also about the future of academic healthcare in Amsterdam we can say little with certainty. This gives us scope to let our thoughts and dreams range further.

The word that occurs to me when I consider this tile, and the current situation of VUmc, or more precisely 'Amsterdam UMC, De Boelelaan location', is *connectivity*. In very direct terms, we currently have the *connection* between two university institutes, the medical centres of the UvA and VU Amsterdam, each with its own history and now moving into a shared future. But this association may be a little obvious. I also see three other meanings.

The first meaning is the connection between *physis* (φύσις) and *psyche* (ψυχή). These concepts were brought together by the two initial professors, the psychiatrist Bouman and the physiologist Buytendijk. Both these professors were, it should be said, themselves convinced that a (sick) human being should be understood as a unity of body and soul. And this indeed still presents an important challenge to modern medicine: both in psychiatry and in the often highly technological health care at a general or academic hospital. The mystery of the interaction between these two aspects of human life remains a challenge for the professionals of our time. It is not possible to fully unravel the puzzle.

Secondly, I think of the connection between personal belief (presented either more or less explicitly) and healthcare. One might think that medical care, training people to be health professionals and carrying out research in this field would be at odds with such a personal belief. The story behind this tile shows, however, that this connection can actually be productive, as long as belief is understood broadly and not imposed in a categorical way.

And thirdly, we have the connection between past and future. Back then, just as now, collaboration was required between universities, disciplines, institutions. But above all: between people with a passion for the work, in order to create such a fine degree programme as one that trains people to be doctors. In this respect, there's nothing new under the sun.

May these three connecting elements continue to be part of the core of academic healthcare in this city, and continue to have positive effects far beyond the city boundaries!

*Abel Thijs, in his role as internist at Amsterdam UMC, is closely involved in medical education at VU Amsterdam.*





▲ Façade of the Valerius Clinic, Amsterdam, 1935.



► Psychiatry class in the Valerius Clinic, 1935, with Professor L. van der Horst.





VU Amsterdam's Archive Collection includes a number of lecture notes taken by students. These hand-written lecture notes are often word-for-word records of the lectures. Together with the professors' own notes, they can offer a glimpse into what education was like in the past. The archives of the Professor of Dutch Language and Literature, Jacob Wille, contain notes covering many of his lectures, including the first courses he gave on 'historical grammar' from 1919.

For a long time, Theology was the largest faculty at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, with Law as a close second. The third faculty that existed since the university's founding, the Faculty of Arts & Philosophy, provided mainly courses for the general first-year education and lectures that were useful for the theology students. During the first decade, the most important figure in this faculty was the classical scholar Jan Woltjer. Abraham Kuyper, who was a professor not only of Theology but of Arts as well, gave the lectures on the Dutch language in the early decades. These lectures were also part of the general first-year programme for arts. Lecture notes preserved in the archive make it clear that Kuyper covered a multitude of topics in his lectures and was well informed on current developments.

In 1918, two new degree programmes – History and Dutch – were introduced, with the primary goal of preparing students for a career in teaching. The Faculty of Arts gradually expanded from that point on. The Dutch language programme began with the appointment of Jacob Wille (1881-1964), who had until then been a teacher at the Christelijk Gymnasium in The Hague. Wille immediately began work on his doctoral research project and, after earning his PhD, was named full professor in 1924 and appointed to the chair of 'Dutch language and literature, general linguistics and Old High German'. For many years, Wille taught the entire degree programme single-handedly; he himself joked about his 'one-man programme'. Only the course in Middle Dutch was taught by the historian Goslinga. Wille taught classes on the history of literature, textual interpretation, literary theory,

historical grammar, semantics, Gothic, Old Norse and general linguistics.

In those days, taking 'college notes' during lectures usually meant transcribing the lesson content word for word as it was presented by the professor at dictation speed. Little use was made of books, and the first step in preparing for the exam (which would always be an oral exam) was always reviewing the lesson content from your lecture notes. Naturally, not all lecturers were equally enthralling. Taking dictation from Abraham Kuyper, a powerful rhetorician, was anything but dull.

Student Taeke Ferwerda later (in 1937) reflected on Kuyper's lectures on 'Aesthetics': 'Whenever this lecture was given, the room ... was too small, and no wonder! While Kuyper's language, even when he was improvising, was always quite cultivated and of an opulent richness, the words during this lecture were especially well attuned to the peculiar demands of the subject matter. Quite often one wished to lay down one's pen and instead just listen and enjoy. It was indeed such a torturous contrast: to be obliged to record speech that made one's heart soar in the lowly form of hastily-written lecture notes. Something in us was set aquiver as Kuyper's eloquence brought us closer to the soul of sculpture and architecture, of music and poetry.'

Jacob Wille appears to have delivered his lectures in a more traditional fashion, reading aloud from his own notes. Students were supposed to show creativity above all in the papers they had to write. Wille would present the examinee with a note describing a topic such as 'the linguistic standpoints of Willem Bilderdijk',

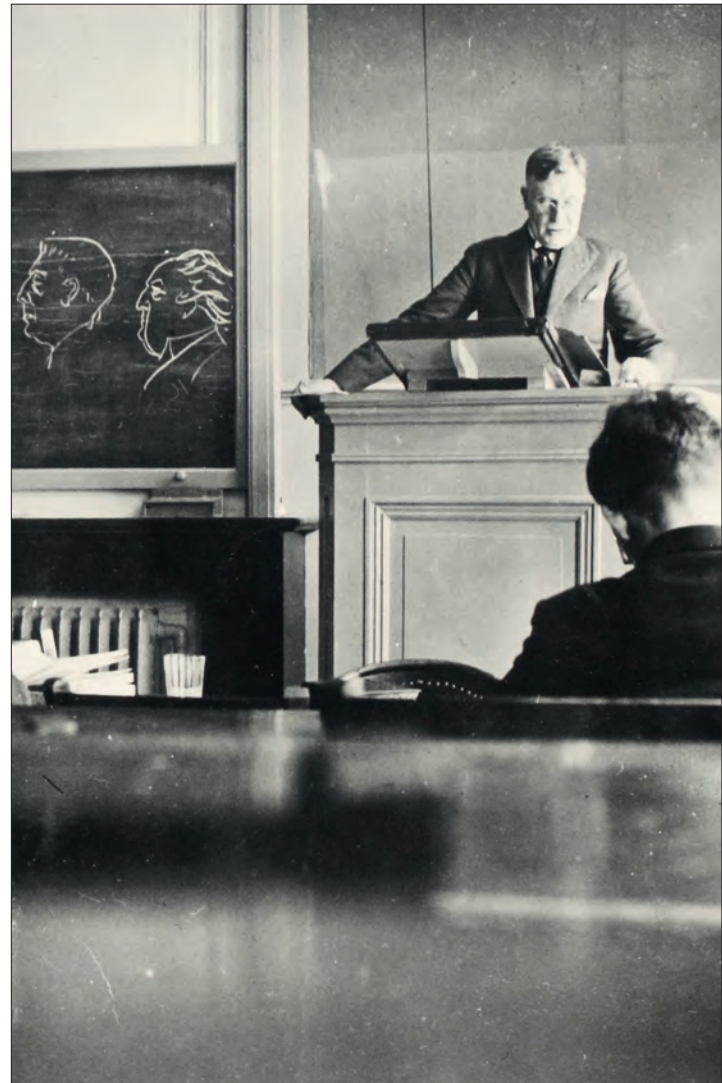
on which the student would be expected to submit an essay within 14 days' time.

At the start of the year, students received the *Series Lectionum*, a course schedule compiled in Latin listing all lectures to be given anywhere at the university during that academic year. Looking at the 1920-1921 *Series Lectionum* (see picture on page 35), we can see that the Faculty of Arts had already grown quite large by that point. Many of its courses were also attended by students of other faculties. As the university continued to grow, the *Series Lectionum* also expanded.

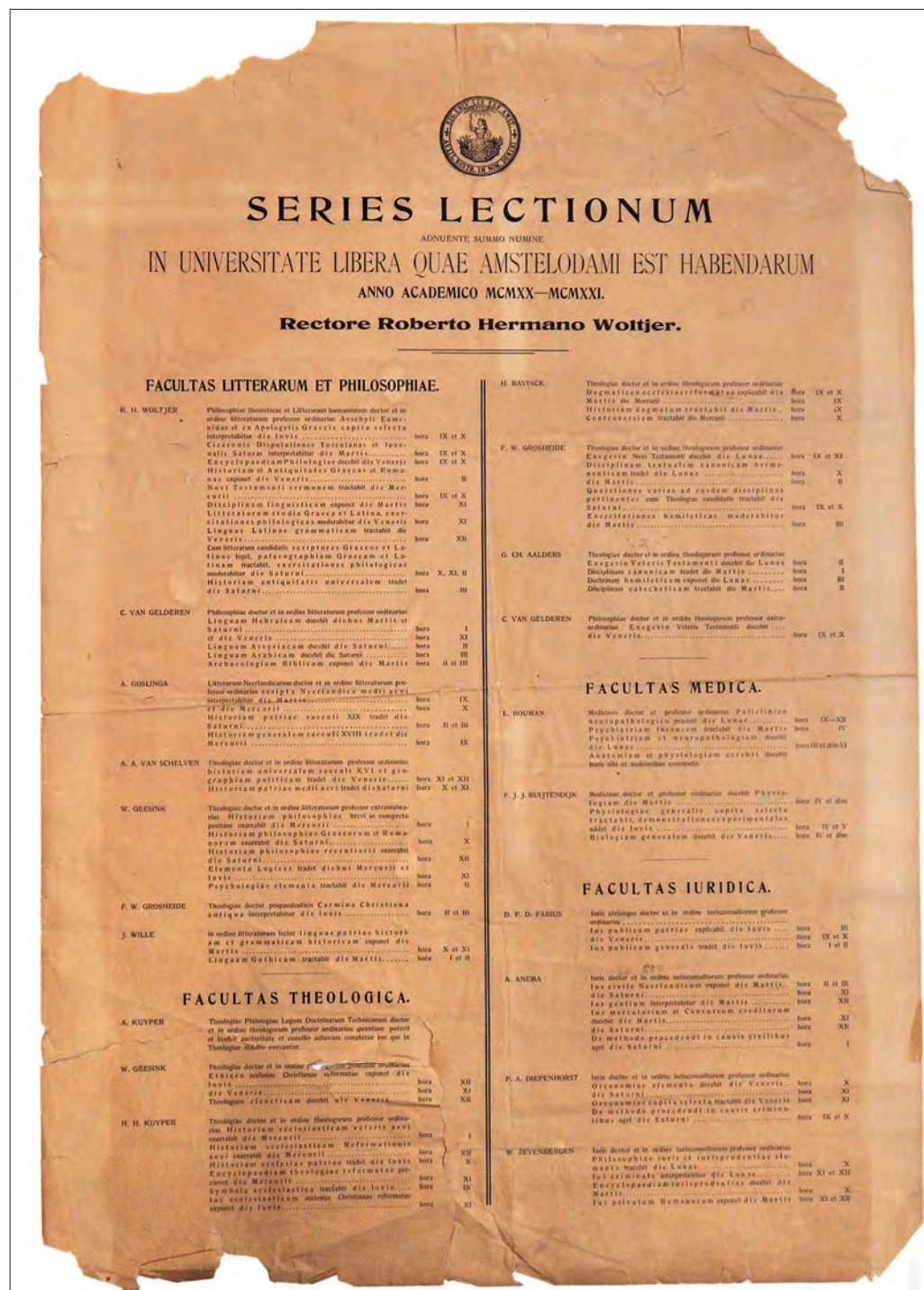
After the War, the Dutch degree programme began to grow, a trend that became particularly apparent in the 1970s, when nearly 100 new students enrolled each year. The Faculty of Arts as a whole grew as well, and a large number of new fields of study emerged. Today, the Faculty of Humanities, as it is currently known, offers a wide range of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes. The dictation lectures of the past were definitively abandoned in the 1960s and replaced by a multitude of activating teaching methods.



◀ J. Wille 1955.



▲ The theologian G.Ch. Aalders teaches in a room at the Keizersgracht. The blackboard shows chalk drawings of A. Kuyper and H. Colijn.



▲ Series Lectionum by the VU Amsterdam in 1920-21.





▲ Books from the Bavinck Collection.

Ever since the university was founded in 1880, literature has been necessary for research by professors and students. The collections of individual collectors and professors were – and are – an essential source of new additions. In the early 1920s, one such addition was the Bavinck collection, while the Postma-Gosker collection is one of the most recent. But how do such additions actually take effect?

### The Bavinck Collection

*Willemien van Dijk and Anneke Houtkamp*

Theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) arrived at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1902 and became a Professor of Dogmatics, Ethics and Related Subjects in 1904. In doing so, he succeeded Abraham Kuyper, who had held this chair until he was appointed Prime Minister in 1901. Hundreds of books from Bavinck's private library have been preserved in the collections of the University Library to this very day. While it is not easy to uncover exactly how these books found their way to the University Library, it is certainly possible to identify two main routes.

Firstly, from 1917 on, VU Amsterdam made use of what were known as seminar libraries. These were relatively small collections of books that fell under the responsibility of a specific professor and could be used for teaching purposes. The professor in question was tasked with supplying the librarian at the time, J.C. Breen, with the titles of the works in such collections. Breen would then enter these titles into the written library catalogue. In this way, the catalogue was expanded without placing a strain on either the limited budget available to the library or the equally limited space for storing books. In the current metadata, books that were part of such a seminar library can be recognised by the note 'Oud Bestand' [Old Stock]. It is quite likely that Bavinck was one of those in charge of such a seminar library. A note such as Bav.1251, attached to the volume *De opvoedkundige denkbeelden van Betje Wolffen Aagje Deken; bijdrage tot de kennis van de opvoeding hier*

*te lande in de achttiende eeuw* [The pedagogical ideas of Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken: a contribution to the knowledge of pedagogy in this country in the eighteenth century], could mean that this work belonged to his seminar library, or a subcollection named after him, under that number.

Among current University Library collections it is also possible to find books featuring Bavinck's bookplates. These books were probably purchased by the University Library. Following Bavinck's death on 29 July 1921, a committee was established to raise money for the purpose of acquiring Bavinck's collection. It would seem that they had no problem raising sufficient funds. What was a problem, however, was lack of space. In 1923, librarian Breen expressed his disappointment about the proposed alterations to Keizersgracht 162 and 164. The plans failed to include the space needed to house Bavinck's collection. In the end they were adjusted, and the second and third storeys of the two canal-side buildings were connected with one another and turned into a library. In July 1924, Breen announced that the crates holding Bavinck's books were to be unpacked and the work of cataloguing them could begin. In the current metadata, the books added to the collection through this acquisition can be identified by the note 'Acq.nr./col.: Bavinck' or 'oude sign.: Bavinck'.

A century later, it is unfortunately no longer possible to determine exactly what Bavinck's library looked like in his day. As a result of relocations, the books have become scattered across the various depots, and due to changes in library systems,

we have lost sight of the collection as a whole. Nevertheless, in September 2020 we were able to use the modern metadata to shed light on which works from the current library collection were once part of the Bavinck collection. We successfully traced a total of 891 titles. This fine assortment of books demonstrates the breadth of Bavinck's interests.

*Willemien van Dijk is curator of Manuscripts & Early Printed Books and Anneke Houtkamp works as a metadata specialist at the University Library.*

## Bavinck and the Postma-Gosker Collection

*Ferenc Postma and Margriet Gosker*

In 2012 we donated our historic book collection to VU Amsterdam. Only recently we were informed that this was the last major collection acquired by the university. When we were asked to write something about one of the first and oldest collections to be added to the University Library – the Bavinck collection – we immediately began digging through our bookcases. There, alongside Hepp's comprehensive biography *Dr Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam, 1921), we found two works of Bavinck himself: *Bilderdijk als denker en dichter* [Bilderdijk as a thinker and a poet] (Kampen, 1906) and his ideas on *Het christelijk huisgezin* [The Christian Family] (Kampen, 1908). Obviously, Bavinck had not escaped our attention, and indeed he hardly could have, given his importance for 'us Reformed Christians' – even if it was quite some time ago.

However, these were not the only works from Bavinck's collection to emerge from our shelves. We also found three issues from the series of brochures entitled 'Groote godsdiensten' [Major Religions], which were published at that time in Baarn by Hollandia-Drukkerij. These are issues

2, 4 and 5, which were published in 1911 and 1912 and sold for 40 cents apiece. Issue 2 is about 'The religion of Ancient Egypt'; Issue 4 deals with 'The religion of Israel'; and Issue 5 covers 'The religions of the Babylonians and Assyrians'. In terms of format, the brochures are exceedingly simple, yet their content is important enough to have earned them a place in Bavinck's private library. Bookplates pasted in the front wrapper of each brochure leave no doubt about their provenance. The labels are marked 'Ex-Libris Bavinck' and 'Anno 1921': the year in which Bavinck's library was acquired by the VU. Furthermore, the corresponding book number has been preserved in all three cases: Bib. Bav. 1635, 1636 and 1641, as evidenced by the labels pasted to the front covers.

While we do not remember when the three brochures made their way into our bookcase, we do know that we were immediately struck by the lovely bookplates pasted inside them. This seemed to us to provide ample reason to take particular care with this remarkable bit of VU Amsterdam heritage. When the time comes for our Postma-Gosker Library to definitively go to VU Amsterdam, it will be our pleasure to add these three titles from Bavinck's private library to that collection – at which point they will return to their rightful home after a century.

*Ferenc Postma and Margriet Gosker are book collectors and the donors of the Postma-Gosker collection.*





▲ Louis Jacques Goudman, *Herman Bavinck*, 1922, posthumous, Oil on canvas, 68,5 x 53 cm.

▼ Bookplate from the Bavinck Collection.



## 1925-1930 | Philosophy of the Law Idea: the Start of a Philosophical Tradition

Two consecutive appointments in 1926 were to have a major impact on the development of philosophy at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. On 15 October of that year, Herman Dooyeweerd accepted a professorship at the Faculty of Law, while Dick Vollenhoven did the same on 26 October at the Faculty of Arts & Philosophy. The philosophy resulting from the discourse between the two men came to be known as 'Calvinist philosophy' or – after the title of Dooyeweerd's main work – *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* [Philosophy of the Law Idea]. René van Woudenberg explores this philosophical reflection on science and scholarship, which has become embedded in the university's DNA.

The ideas expounded in Dooyeweerd's ambitious three-volume work *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* (1935-36) were later developed and refined in English under the title *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (1953-58). This philosophy remained the dominant school of thought at VU Amsterdam for several decades, and was introduced to many of its students since most degree programmes included an introductory course on the subject.

To be sure, not everyone was uniformly enthusiastic: whereas Dooyeweerd's lectures were praised for their clarity, his publications were sometimes considered to be impenetrable due to their distinctive jargon. It was mostly kindred spirits who subsequently built on his work, yet his originality was far more widely appreciated. At his farewell in 1964, G.E. Langemeijer, chairman of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences' literary department, wrote: 'Dooyeweerd is the most original philosopher the Netherlands has ever produced, and that even includes Spinoza.' In any case, the philosophy represented an original interpretation of the ideals that inspired the creation of VU Amsterdam and are still embedded in our DNA to this day.



▲ Herman Dooyeweerd, *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, 1935-1936.



## The VU reflection on science in research and education

*René van Woudenberg*

Abraham Kuyper believed in a positive mutual dependency between faith and science rather than a conflict between the two. This view, which was shared by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, was crucial to the founding of VU Amsterdam. The popularly held notion that faith and science are at war with one other and that science will eventually overcome all faith was foreign to them, and they even went so far as to repeatedly argue its inaccuracy.

Among other ideas, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven developed the 'theory of modal aspects'. According to this theory, reality comprises a range of 'aspects', including a numerical aspect, a spatial aspect, a physical aspect, an economic aspect, a legal aspect, and more. The sciences each focus on one aspect of the world: algebra examines the numerical aspect, geometry the spatial aspect, economics the economic aspect and so on. The various sciences thus have a certain degree of autonomy from one other. The theory thus implies that the entirety of our reality cannot be known through any single science, sounding a clarion call for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity.

Philosophical reflections on the nature and interrelation of the sciences, on their potential and their limits, have always been important at VU Amsterdam. One manifestation of this is the fact that every student takes a course in 'philosophical education'. In addition to offering such reflections, these lectures also explore the ethical aspects of science and academic integrity. In the spirit of Dooyeweerd, this implies an acknowledgement of the difference between merely adhering to proper scientific practice and having an adequate vision on science as a whole.

VU Amsterdam's genuine appreciation of these more general and philosophical questions about science is also demonstrated by our successful 'A Broader Mind' programme,

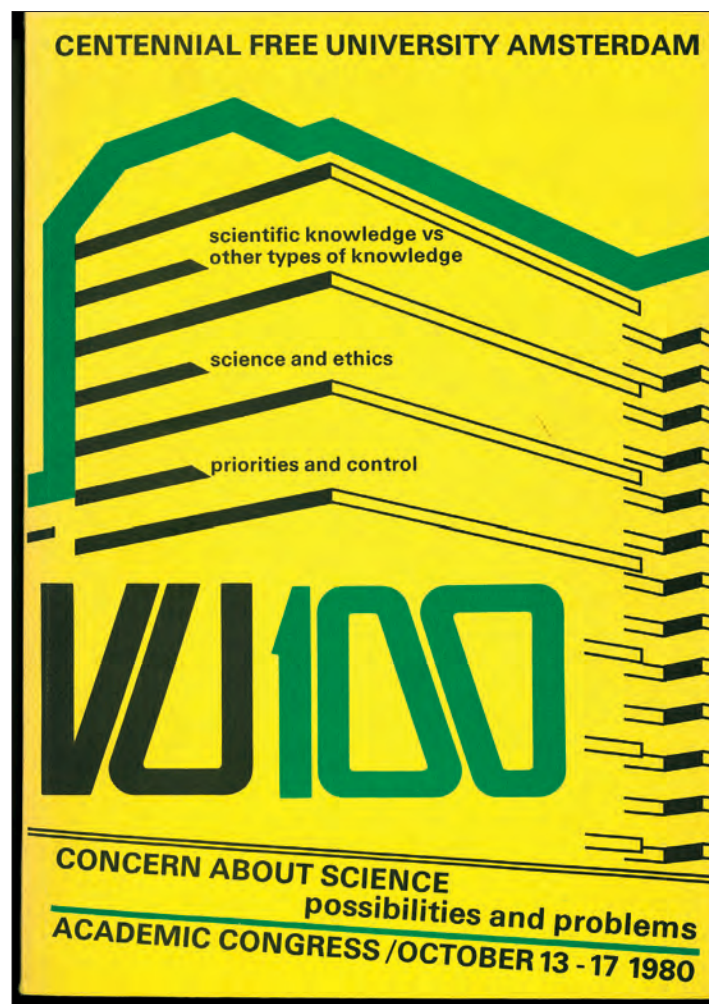
in which numerous students and lecturers voluntarily collaborate on questions of science, values and what it means to live a good life.

In keeping with VU Amsterdam's DNA, these subjects are explored through both research and education. The Stevin Centre conducts research on the history of science, changing perceptions of science and scientific method, and the social and cultural significance of science. The relationship between science and the Big Questions (does science erode our belief in free will, morality and religion, as sometimes is claimed?) is explored by the Abraham Kuyper Center for Science and the Big Questions.

*René van Woudenberg is Professor of Epistemology and Metaphysics at the Faculty of Humanities, and serves as director of the Abraham Kuyper Center for Science and the Big Questions.*



▲ H. Dooyeweerd as Rector Magnificus in the Concertgebouw, Dies Natalis, 20 October 1950.



▲ The VU's tradition of reflection on science was continued, such as here at a conference on the centenary of the VU with the theme 'Concern about science: possibilities and problems'.

In reviewing the history of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, there is no escaping the story of *Vrouwen VU-hulp* [Women's Aid for the VU]. It symbolises the support of the Reformed supporters for 'their' university, the social involvement of the university, and the role of women within this organisation. The chair of VUvereniging, Frans van Drimmelen, reflects on the continued importance of this very special VU-tradition.

In 1980, on its 100th anniversary, VU Amsterdam received a bronze statue from the Rabobank. It represents the many female savers and organisers of Vrouwen VU-hulp who had helped the university financially since the 1930s. The statue, created by the artist Pieter de Monchy (1916-2011), was placed in the botanical garden of the VU Hospital and later in the Hortus Botanicus. In 2014, it was displayed in the entrance to the Main Building for a while, after which it was given a nice position in the guest house of VUmc. 'Stichting gastenverblijven VUmc' offers low-priced rooms for family and friends of hospital patients, a project that ties in well with the range of projects developed by Vrouwen VU-hulp.

Until the 1950s, the Vrije Universiteit was fully funded from private donations. As a result, there was never enough money to achieve the ambitions of this constantly growing university. From 1932 onwards, several women – led by Sibbeltje Verdam-Okma (1884-1970), married to VU-director Jan Verdam – started raising funds in order to set up a medical faculty. As an 'intermediate step', they also saved up for the Physics and Chemistry laboratories. After the hospital was established in 1966 and the university gained financial equality in 1970, the women saved up for necessary 'extras' such as improved accessibility to the hospital for disabled people and all kinds of projects in developing countries.

The women would put small change aside from their housekeeping money, keeping it in the famous VU collecting tin.

Given the fact that the savings campaign had 115,000 savers at its peak, its coordination (emptying the tins and counting the money) was very labour-intensive. The country was divided into regions, each with its own regional head, and rounds were made to each household to empty the tins. A lot of money was involved: Vrouwen VU-hulp raised a total of almost 30 million euros (converted and taking inflation into account).

The long-term and extensive savings campaign by Vrouwen VU-hulp was entirely organised by women. This active contribution was at odds with the widespread idea among the Reformed population that women's responsibility was primarily at home, in the family. Meanwhile, the organisation made a great difference to VU Amsterdam. Although this specific supporting task was role-confirming, it also contributed greatly to the emancipation of Reformed women in their own circle.





▲ Pieter de Monchy, *De Spaarster* [The Saver], 1980, bronze, at the Guest House of VUmc, 2021.

## The lasting significance of the VU Amsterdam collecting tin

*Frans van Drimmelen*

Members of the VUvereniging [VU Association], the association that founded VU Amsterdam 140 years ago, continue to form a wide-ranging network in society of people who feel connected to the university. My great-great-grandmother Lijntje Maris-de Haan was a great fan of Abraham Kuyper and VU Amsterdam, and was a member of the VUvereniging from the very beginning. Although she lived in West Brabant, she was an active participant in Amsterdam meetings. From the very beginning of the savings campaign in 1932, the VU collecting tin featured prominently on her mantelpiece – just like it did on the mantelpiece of my great-grandmother Anna Punt-Maris and my grandmother Heiltje van Drimmelen-Punt. They saved money faithfully, as did many other women. They were early heroes of VU Amsterdam. By supporting projects in society and providing grants, VUvereniging continues the tradition established by Vrouwen VU-hulp and others. Although the collecting tin has become academic heritage, the commitment of VU Amsterdam alumni and many others remains strong to this day.

*Frans van Drimmelen is chairman of VUvereniging*



▲ The classic green VU collecting tin, 1950-1990.





▲ Tapestry 'Helping Hands', fashioned by women savers from Vrouwen VU-hulp, donated to VU Amsterdam on the occasion of its centenary in 1980. Here it hangs opposite the Aula in September 2020.





▲ Heavy water ampoule bought for the research of Gerard Sizoo, made by Norsk Hydro, 1935-1940.

Physics was one of the disciplines that were present at the launch of the Faculty of Science, the fourth 'complete' faculty of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in 1930. Gerard Sizoo became the first professor of experimental physics and brought research into radioactivity and nuclear physics to the university. What is the current state of the physics research at VU Amsterdam? After a short account of the launch of the degree programme based on an ampoule of 'heavy water', the present Professor of Physics and Astronomy Wim Ubachs offers some reflections on today's research.

### The start of a new research field

In 1927, VU Amsterdam decided to set up a science faculty with three chairs. In 1930, physicist Gerard Sizoo (1900-1994) became one of the first professors at this new Faculty of Science. A fourth faculty was required as a result of legal obligations, and a Faculty of Science was thought to be cheaper than the long-awaited medical faculty. At the same time it was a 'step in the right direction' because future medical students would have to take science courses. During the first year, nine students enrolled for the entire faculty. In the period up to 1943 (when the university temporarily closed due to the War), twenty students passed the doctoral examination in physics. The required laboratory was built on De Lairesestraat and taken into use in 1933.

Together with chemist J. Coops, mathematician J.F. Koksma and actuary M. van Haaften, Sizoo developed the physics, chemistry and mathematics research and education. Sizoo chose 'radioactivity' as the subject of research, since no other laboratory in the Netherlands had focused on the subject. At the time, it was still a relatively inexpensive field, an important additional consideration for the privately funded university. This choice of radioactivity – and more broadly: nuclear phenomena – proved to be extremely happy, as this field was undergoing major developments. As a result of his research, Sizoo laid the foundation for nuclear research in the Netherlands, which would flourish after the War.

In 1938, a Philips neutron generator was purchased for Sizoo's research. A batch of so-called 'heavy water' was also purchased for this purpose. This  $^2\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (dideuterium oxide) can be used as a moderator in nuclear fission reactions, i.e. to slow down neutrons, but is not itself radioactive. Several ampoules of heavy water re-emerged in 2017 and now form part of the heritage collection. They come from the Norsk Hydro factory, which was part of the race to develop the atomic bomb during World War II. However, the graphite used by the Americans worked better, reducing the importance of heavy water for this type of research. VU Amsterdam remained very active in the field of nuclear physics after the War, and a cyclotron and radionuclide centre were built on the new campus in the 1960s.

## Physics at VU Amsterdam since 1980

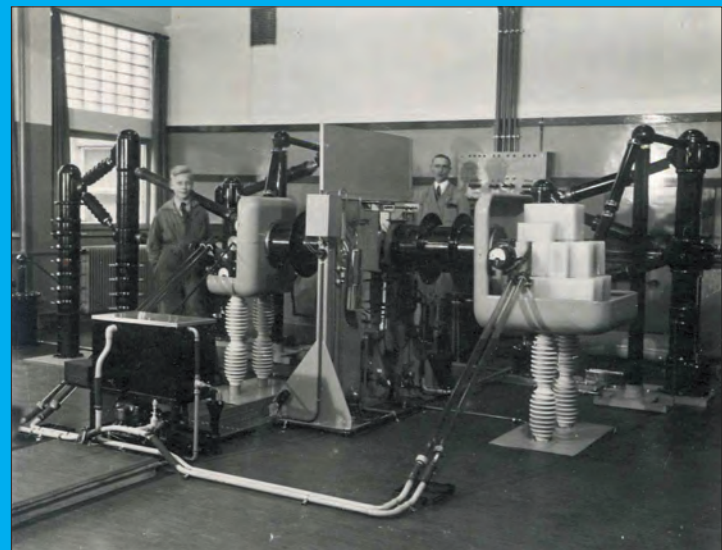
Wim Ubachs

Until 1980, physics at VU Amsterdam was heavily focused on nuclear physics, but with the availability of increasingly powerful accelerators, research shifted to what is now known as ‘particle physics’ or ‘high-energy physics’. Nuclear and particle research in the Netherlands was united in the Dutch National Institute for Subatomic Physics (Nikhef) located in Watergraafsmeer, where the AmPS accelerator began operation in 1992. At the same time, physicists from VU Amsterdam became involved through Nikhef in activities at CERN (Geneva), where particle collisions at ever increasing energy were being studied. When the Large Hadron Collider (LHCb) was commissioned, physicists from VU Amsterdam opted for the subject of symmetry breaking between matter and antimatter, which is studied primarily with the LHCb detector, one of the four large set-ups at CERN. Over the past decade, particle research by VU Amsterdam has partly shifted towards astroparticles and VU Amsterdam physicists have been involved in the detection of gravitational waves.

With a higher intake of students and an expansion of staff numbers throughout the 1970s and 1980s, physics research at VU Amsterdam expanded further. In nuclear physics, research began to focus on the effects of radiation on living matter. This marked the starting point of biophysics, which has since gone on to focus wholly on research into photosynthesis. Initially, research into nuclear properties was the preserve of atomic physics, but research evolved to become autonomous in this area as well. It now aims to test fundamental physics through extremely precise measurements of atoms and small molecules. The laser was central to both biophysics and atomic physics, leading to the foundation of the VU Laser Centre in 1992.

Today, an important part of physics research at VU Amsterdam is integrated into LaserLaB, where in addition to atomic physics and photosynthesis, research is also being conducted into living matter and medical/diagnostic techniques involving lasers. Thanks to their laser expertise, VU Amsterdam physicists were closely involved, along with UvA colleagues, in the founding of the ARCNL research institute, which cooperates closely with ASML to improve nano-lithographic techniques for the microchip industry.

*Wim Ubachs is Professor of Physics and Astronomy, Atomic, Molecular and Laser Physics and is affiliated with the LaserLaB VU.*



▲ The neutron generator in the laboratory at the De Lairesestraat, 1940.





▲ A.C.A. Rotgans, Laboratories Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam for physics and chemistry, De Lairesestraat - Lassusstraat, B.T. Boeyinga, Watercolour 1930.

Across from the Aula in the Main Building, under the watchful eye of Abraham Kuyper, two plaques commemorate those who fell during the Second World War. The plaques were originally installed in the hall of the former university building at Keizersgracht 162 in 1952, and then given a place in the new Main Building on the De Boelelaan. Recently, the life stories of each of these victims were uncovered through research and brought together in the book *Een oorlogsplaquette ontrafeld* [A War Plaque Unravelling]. Holocaust and oral history specialist Bettine Siertsema reflects on the plaque, the war-time history of VU Amsterdam, and the book.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has no reason to regret its conduct during the Second World War. While it may have lacked an inspiring moment like Professor Cleveringa's famous speech in Leiden, in which he condemned the dismissal of his Jewish colleagues, the university did have a large number of students and professors who were active in the resistance, which some of them paid for with their lives. The plaque in the hall across from the entrance to the Aula bears witness to this fact.

The location is supposed to be prominent, yet the plaque is in fact easily overlooked, and I have yet to see a single student notice it on their own and pause in front of it. The memorial plaque itself offers rather meagre information. Dates of birth and death are lacking, as are the roles the commemorated played in the academic community – the 'Civitas Academica' – and the manner of their respective deaths. The list of names does not even distinguish between men and women. The brevity was no doubt dictated by the great number of names to be included: 91 in total. Additional information would have required inflating the plaque to gigantic proportions.

Those who look closely at the memorial plaque will notice several irregularities in the three columns that make up the list of names: the name at the bottom of each column deviates from the alphabetical order observed in the preceding names. Also evident is the addition of an extra strip of bronze, apparently for the

purpose of including a 91st name, E. Jüdel. It would seem that the decision to include this lab technician in the list was taken at a later point in time. She is one of the three women included, the other two being Jewish students, which is likely a reasonable reflection of the numeric distribution between the genders at the university in the 1940s.

This information can be found in the book *Een oorlogsplaquette ontrafeld* [A War Plaque Unravelling] (Amsterdam: Boom, 2020), which offers background information on how the plaque came to be, as well as on all the people named on it. In the first chapter, George Harinck recounts the entire decision-making process. In a sense, it makes for entertaining reading. His account touches not only on the various parties involved, each of whom had their own vision, and the power relationships between them – which certainly played a role – but also on the points that needed to be resolved in the ultimate choice of wording and other choices along the way. Should, for instance, a person who died a natural death while a prisoner (such as Edith Jüdel) be included, or someone killed by friendly fire from the Allies, or someone who drowned while attempting to escape? Do all these individuals meet the criteria of having died for Freedom and the Fatherland? In the extensive final chapter, Wim Berkelaar and Tjeerd de Jong have compiled the results of their painstaking historical research in the short biographies of every person listed on the plaque.



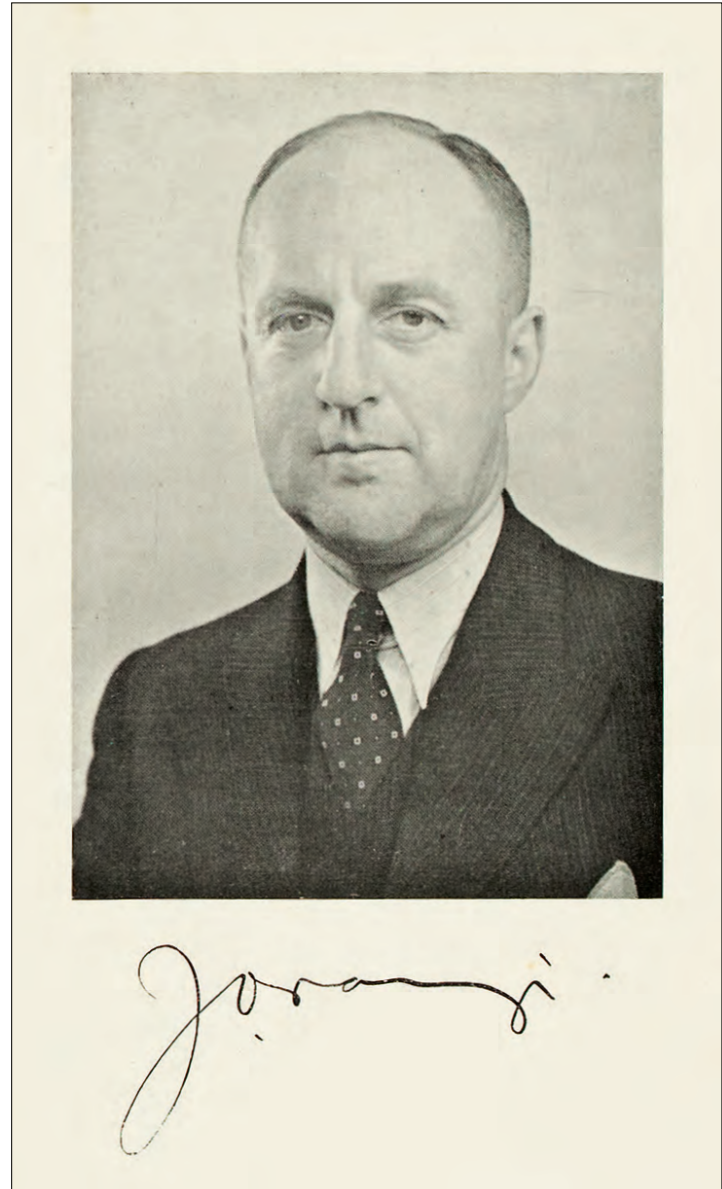


▲ The plaque with names of the WWII fallen in the VU Main Building.



Perhaps the second plaque, which hangs somewhat oddly under the first, is an expression of the never fully satisfying compromises that are an inevitable part of such a decision-making process. Professor Ko (Jacobus) Oranje was appointed Rector Magnificus in 1943 and played an important role in the resistance. In addition to coordinating all manner of resistance actions and escape routes, he and his colleague Victor Rutgers also established a system by which – following the closure of the universities – students could continue to attend clandestine lectures and sit exams in the professors' own homes. He died less than a year after the War and therefore should not have been included on the plaque. The ingenious solution of mounting a second plaque below the first was an attempt to honour Oranje after all – and simultaneously emphasised VU Amsterdam's perception of itself as 'university of the resistance' (a title that was not entirely deserved). The book *Een oorlogsplaquette ontrafeld* provides the indispensable background information on the names and other decisions that went into creating the two plaques.

*Bettine Siertsema is an Assistant Professor of History at the Faculty of Humanities, who specialises in Holocaust literature and oral history.*



► J. Oranje, 1945.



▲ Rector Magnificus R. Schippers lays a wreath on behalf of the Senate at the memorial plaques in the hall of the University Building on Keizersgracht, May 4, 1965.

▼ Rector R.W. Dijk of the student corps, commemorating the fallen at the monument, May 4, 1965.





▲ The EcoCirc, built by the instrument workshop of Chemistry on the instructions of Professor Folkert de Roos, Amsterdam 1951-1953.



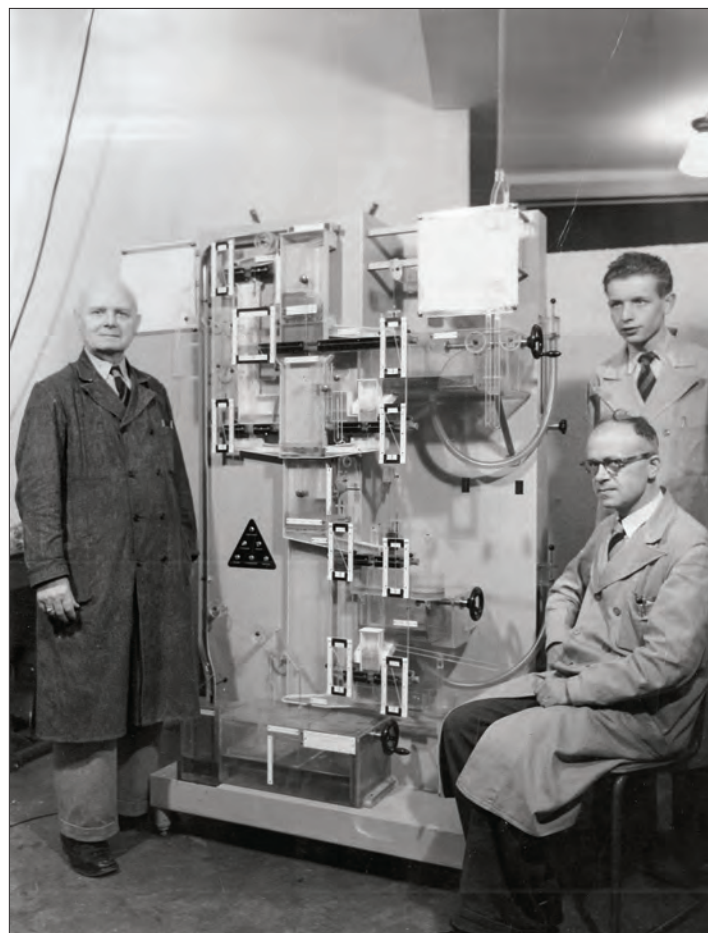
The economics and business programmes are not known for the objects they used for teaching, perhaps excepting slide rules. However, the VU Collection does include one very special object from the early days of what was then called the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences (social sciences got their own faculty in 1964). Former dean Harmen Verbruggen reflects on this object and the early days of the faculty.

### The Economic Flow Circulator Demonstrator

The Economic Flow Circulator Demonstrator (EcoCirc) is a unique machine made up of a number of plastic pipes in which coloured water is pumped around. This hydraulic computer was designed to show how an economy works. Sliding plates represent economic variables and lead flows into and out of the economy. Money represented by water literally flows through the model. Some of it even leaks away via the black market.

The instrument workshop for Chemistry spent 1951 to 1953 building the EcoCirc, on the instructions of Professor Folkert de Roos and based on design drawings for the MONIAC (Monetary National Income Analogue Computer). De Roos had seen the MONIAC in London and was very impressed. It was the invention of William (Bill) Phillips, a student of the London School of Economics in 1949 who later became a world renowned economist.

For many years, the EcoCirc was used to teach students at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences and to give demonstrations to visitors. However, it lacked the precision necessary for research purposes and had also started to leak over the years. In 2018, the EcoCirc was cleaned and restored but was not possible to get it up and running again. Since then, it has been on show in a special display case in the School of Business and Economics on the eighth floor of the Main Building.



▲ Employees of the Chemistry instrument shop present the EcoCirc they built in 1953.

## A turbulent start and an ideological battleground

Harmen Verbruggen

The Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences had a turbulent start in 1948. Plans for the creation of an economics faculty at VU Amsterdam, including the development of a substantive profile, had started several years prior to this date. However, the planning process quickly gained momentum after it was decided that a new faculty was to be launched before 1950. This would enable VU Amsterdam to meet the legal requirement of having five faculties in order to retain its university status. However, there were neither any professors nor a curriculum at this stage; plans had not progressed beyond the profile envisaged for the new faculty, about which a serious difference of opinion arose.

The directors of the university were envisaging a Christian approach to economic science. However, the professors hastily recruited for the new faculty had other ideas, despite having Reformed beliefs themselves. They hailed from the *Nederlandse Economische Hogeschool* [Netherlands School of Economics] in Rotterdam, where they had learned to think of economics as a value-free science. One of them, Jelle Zijlstra (1918-2001), later a Minister and Prime Minister, stood his ground.

To complicate matters, a controversy arose within this value-free science itself. During the 1930s economic crisis, an English economist gained prominence as a critic of existing economic policies. This great thinker was J.M. Keynes. His answer to economic depression and rising unemployment was to vastly increase government spending. However, promoting government involvement in economic life hardly appealed to the directors of VU Amsterdam. No Christian economics – and on top a push for greater government involvement. What would really be left of a VU economist?

Folkert de Roos (1920-2000), one of Zijlstra's colleagues from Rotterdam, was recruited as a new professor one year after the creation of the new faculty. He wanted to use the EcoCirc to visualise the new Keynesian model: a mechanical

representation of the economic cycle by flowing water and a number of valves and pumps. It enabled students to see the economic consequences of measures such as an increase in government spending. Thus an ideological battle was settled on two fronts.

The EcoCirc became obsolete in time – Keynes fell out of favour and the machine started to leak more and more – until the financial and economic crisis of 2008 and the pandemic of 2020. Central banks and governments pumped huge amounts of money into the economy in a bid to avert crises. Keynes himself would have been at a loss and the EcoCirc would not have borne the strain. The result would have been the last and largest flooding.

*Harmen Verbruggen is an Emeritus Professor of International Environmental Economics and was the Dean of the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business from 2004 till 2013.*

Technical drawing of a mechanical assembly, likely a pump or valve mechanism, showing dimensions and labels.

**Dimensions (mm):**

- Overall width: 220
- Overall height: 170
- Top left section: 40, 15, 47, 33, 55, 25, 80
- Bottom left section: 26, 30, 20, 25, 80, 20, 3
- Right side section: 25, 15, 20, 3, 150, 15, 22, 31, 35, 4, 3, 15, 4

**Labels:**

- missing
- missing 25x25x20
- 150
- 15
- 22
- 31
- 35
- 4
- 3
- 15
- 4

140 YEARS OF HERITAGE AT [VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM](#)



It's something we're all familiar with at VU Amsterdam: the boxes with piles of the latest *Ad Valvas*, full of news, opinions and critical articles; and of course the corresponding website. The history of *Ad Valvas* dates back to 1953, when it first appeared as a news bulletin. Since then, the university magazine has had a turbulent history. The current editor-in-chief Marieke Schilp compares past and present.

### How it all began

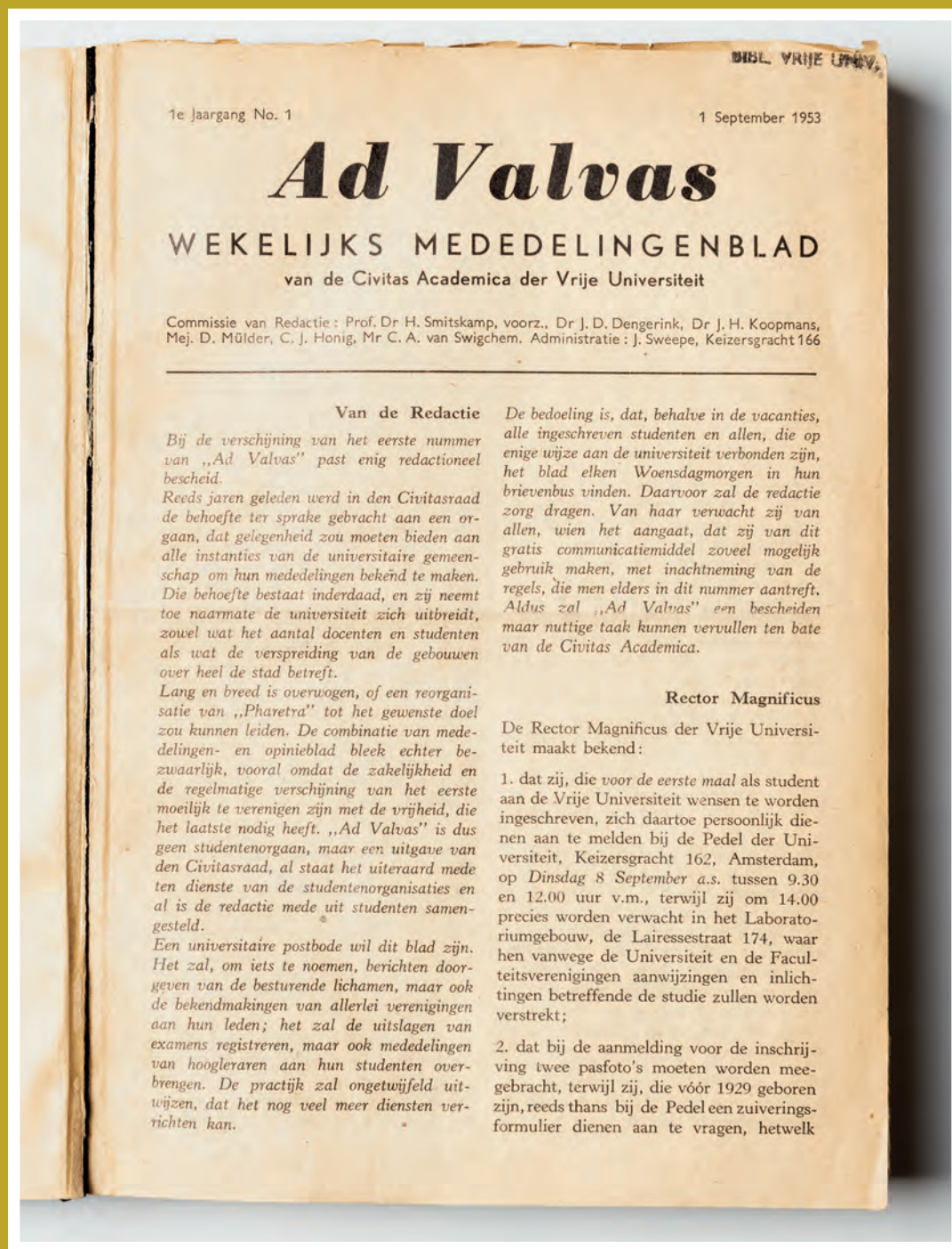
The history of *Ad Valvas*, the independent journalistic platform of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, begins in 1953. The first issue appeared on 1 September of that year, with the subtitle 'weekly official journal of the Civitas Academica of the Vrije Universiteit'. It was a folded A4 sheet, put together by a VU office worker and featuring mostly official announcements. *Ad Valvas* arose from the need for all bodies of the university community to have their announcements printed. The term 'ad valvas' (i.e. 'on the doors') was already familiar: it was used for the announcement board on the door of the university building. As it announced in the first issue, *Ad Valvas* aimed to perform a 'modest but useful task' for the university, which began growing rapidly in this period. It was sent to members of staff and to students.

In the first decade the journal was mostly filled with official announcements: by the Rector, the faculties, the student and study associations, and so on. In 1965, *Ad Valvas* was published for the first time on glossy white A4 paper and the journal received a slightly more generous format with room for articles with more content. But things would hardly get more exciting than an item about a professor's anniversary, a new student pastor, or the buildings under construction at the Buitenveldert campus.

Things changed in the 1970s. Firstly in terms of appearance: *Ad Valvas* became a newspaper in tabloid format. But in terms of content, too: *Ad Valvas* became more independent and started presenting news 'in a journalistically responsible way', with space

for opinions and aiming 'if possible to elicit opinions on major issues'. In the 1970s, the journal reported on the many clashes and conflicts that occurred in the democratically organised university of the day. Moreover, the journal itself regularly became embroiled in the conflicts.

In 1973, following a difference of opinion with the university administration, the first editor in chief stepped down. A new editorial statute, drawn up on the initiative of the University Council, aimed to demarcate the responsibilities more clearly. From now on the role of *Ad Valvas* should be 'to provide information and to record opinion', doing so 'generally without giving the editorial staff's own opinions', while nonetheless independent. As a result, the new editor in chief stayed on much longer than the previous one (sixteen years as opposed to less than a year). Although the following decades were quieter for the organisation, new challenges kept appearing.



▲ The first issue of *Ad Valvas*, weekly official journal of the Civitas Academica of VU Amsterdam, 1953.

## Everything has changed

Marieke Schilp

Just consider the technical developments since the first issue of the journal illustrated here. From hopping on your bike to take the closely typed black-and-white sheets to the printer to get them typeset (hurrah, full-colour became possible!) in those days, to sending a completed magazine straight from your PC to the printing house, in just a few minutes. And after a few more minutes the printed issue is ready.

We began building websites, using social media, chatting with the readers. The editors – these days all professional journalists – can be contacted quickly and personally, and the newspaper shed its formal nature many years ago. It's no longer a newspaper either, by the way.

What might actually be more significant is the steadily growing competition. Not only online, where you can read and zap without end; *all* media have to compete for the attention of readers. What's just as challenging, if not more so, is today's competition within our own university. In addition to a digital revolution, we have had one at the business level. Educational institutions have increasingly organised themselves like businesses. Marketing and image building have become part of the core business. Universities have set up major communication departments.

In the past there were sometimes open disputes – at VU Amsterdam and elsewhere in the higher-education community – about the need and justification for an independent journalistic platform. Universities today, however, take a smarter approach to this. With considerable budgets and editorial teams they set up their own media: digital newsletters and magazines about science and academic activities, about the institution, about the teaching. These are delivered personally to the various target groups. In

the face of such floods of publicity it isn't easy, with a handful of journalists and together with the readers, to find out what's really going on.

Because ultimately this is what remains our task, and it hasn't changed over all these decades: to supply students and staff at the university with independent journalism. To inform, investigate and provide opinions. And to keep asking questions beyond the point where corporate reporting stops. That's what motivates us. In essence, nothing has changed.

*Marieke Schilp has been Editor-in-Chief of Ad Valvas since 2003.*





▲ Ad Valvas's evolution throughout the years.



▲ General Biological Supply House, *Squalus* (spurdog) preserved in spirits, Chicago, c. 1960.

The Biology Collection is a treasure trove of extraordinary objects: some long forgotten, others still actively used and updated. The objects telling the most interesting stories have become part of the academic heritage collection, like this preserved spurdog. Emeritus Professor of Animal Ecology Nico van Straalen draws on his personal memories.

### The beginning of the collection

In 1951, VU Amsterdam launched its degree programme in Biology with Professors Jan Lever for Zoology and Leendert Algera for Botany. After a few years, they were joined by Luppou Kuilman for Plant Ecology and Karel Voous for Animal Taxonomy. They made use of specimens in their teaching, as was the case everywhere at the time and in the preceding centuries. The collection of specimens grew, for example with the acquisition in 1956 of a collection of tropical fruit and seeds from the Royal Tropical Institute (the forerunner of the Tropenmuseum) for Kuilman's lectures. Taxidermied animals, skeletons, animals and plants preserved in spirits, herbaria with dried plants and algae, a collection of beetles and insects: the university continuously acquired whatever was needed for teaching from researchers in the field.

With changes to the field of biology (for example, the rise of microbiology), the collections became less important, and came to serve primarily as decoration for the walls of the science building. However, the quality of the specimens degraded significantly over time – particularly the fluid-preserved specimens. When the VU heritage collections were reinstated in 2016, only a small number of the specimens in jars were still suitable for long-term preservation and exhibitions. Now cleaned and restored by specialists, these specimens will be able to tell the stories of biology at VU Amsterdam far into the future.

► Cultured crystals, used at VU Amsterdam for education in mineralogy, which was taught from 1945 by R. Hooykaas.





## Memories: preserved specimen of a fish

*Nico M. van Straalen*

For years as a Biology student, I kept a young spurdog preserved in spirits in a 125 ml milk bottle. I had taken the creature from the fallopian tube of a viviparous spurdog that we had dissected during a Comparative Morphology of Vertebrates practical. Morphology used to be an important subject: nearly all of biology consisted of studying forms and structures, physical form, the location of internal organs and the structure of tissue. Every professor had a microscope in his office and also often a microtome and a fume cupboard, so that he could prepare specimens and study the profusion of forms. I'm talking about 1970.

Later, the study of forms (morphology, anatomy, histology) more or less disappeared from the field of biology. We knew what animals looked like inside and out, and if you didn't know, you looked it up in a reference book. The Faculty of Biology was still keeping a huge collection of all kinds of animals in spirits in jars and bottles in the teaching storeroom. That's the old-fashioned kind of biology, I used to think whenever I came into that storeroom. There was an unpleasant penetrating smell of formalin and alcohol. Many species of fish stared back at you through the glass with dead eyes. In one corner there was a pile of sheets with dried algae, covered with the dust of time, and the cupboards were stuffed full of skeletons of different species of birds.

'What this field needs is precision', was what I thought when I was a Biology student, and I went on to combine biology and physics. I wanted to know how things worked, perform experiments and develop models. I kept the preserved spurdog for a long time, but then I forgot about it and ultimately it got lost. No one cared any longer about the collection of smelly biological objects. The Biology collection was still there in the 'formalin room' in the BK hall of the science building, but that door was hardly ever opened any more. Everyone was upstairs, in the lab, busy with precision

equipment used to measure every part of an animal. Later on, it even became possible to isolate the DNA from biological material, and molecular life sciences were being developed at the speed of light. The Biology collection was gathering dust and hardly ever used for teaching. Ultimately, it became a permanent exhibition that was shown for years in a large display case gracing the stairwell in the F1 hall.

Interestingly, the study of forms has become completely modern again, if only from the perspective of developmental biology. How do all those forms originate from the fertilised ovum, and which genes control growth and development? Stem cell biology and epigenetics have become subjects that appeal strongly to the imagination. We're only now coming to really understand the phenomenon that Charles Darwin admired in 1859, the question why 'from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.' That's why I'm in favour of at least conserving a keepsake in the VU heritage collection – even if it's just one baby spurdog preserved in spirits – to remember the old biology, as well as what now also forms the basis of the new biology.

*Nico M. van Straalen is Emeritus Professor of Animal Ecology and former Director of Teaching at the Faculty of Sciences.*



▲ Eagle owl, taxidermied, used for zoology education, c. 1970.



▲ Grey-winged trumpeter, ligament preparation (c. 1900) and taxidermied (c. 1960).

► Collection of tropical fruits and seeds used for botany education, purchased in 1956 from the Royal Tropical Institute.



Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has had a connection with Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr and his ideas for many years. In 1965, it awarded an honorary doctorate to this leader of the civil rights movement. The university has various memorials dedicated to this extraordinary man. It also organises the annual Martin Luther King Lecture. The academic gown that King wore during the award ceremony for the honorary doctorate in 1965 has been in the collection since 2018. Sylvia van de Bunt reflects on this special object.

### Academic gown belonging to Jan Buskes (worn by Martin Luther King)

Since the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1930, VU Amsterdam has regularly awarded honorary doctorates to individuals of exceptional achievement. In 1965, the honours were awarded to a specially select group: Prince Bernhard, man of letters Cees Rijnsdorp, Netherlands Antilles politician Efraim Jonckheer, American development economist and administrator of the Marshall Plan Paul Hoffman, French sociologist Jacques Ellul, and the American pastor and leader of the civil rights movement Martin Luther King (1929-1968). There are several memorials to Dr King at VU Amsterdam: a plaque installed in 1982 and a sculpture erected in 2018, both next to the Auditorium in the Main Building. Another special memento of him has been in the collection since 2018.

It has always been customary for the recipient to wear a black gown during the award ceremony for the honorary doctorate. However, Dr King had not brought a gown with him and had to borrow one. The only gown available that would not be too long

for him was one belonging to Jan Buskes, made by the famous makers of academic regalia, Firma Rhebergen. And so it came to pass: Dr King wore Buskes's gown during the ceremony.

Buskes himself, though, didn't like his gown, and reportedly threw it in a corner of his room when he didn't have to wear it. At the time of Buskes's death in 1980, newly ordained ministers cast lots for the second-hand gown. The lucky winner had the velvet replaced, so that the regalia could be worn again for years. The refurbished gown, the accompanying cap and the original velvet were donated to VU Amsterdam in 2018.



▲ Martin Luther King also serves as an inspiration to students in the University Library, 2021.





▲ Academic gown belonging to Rev. Jan Buskes, worn by Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr in 1965, Firma Rhebergen, around 1925, Amsterdam.

## Modesty is a virtue

*Sylvia van de Bunt*

The exciting backstory of Rev. Jan Buskes's gown was further augmented recently by Dr Jan van Butselaar. He told me the story during an interview that was part of an MLK interview series featuring alumni who met Martin Luther King during his visit to VU Amsterdam in 1965. Van Butselaar remembers very vividly that Dr King, unlike the other doctoral candidates, did not wear formal evening attire. He had not brought any academic regalia from America, so he borrowed Jan Buskes's gown. They were about the same height. Buskes and Dr King were friends and real kindred spirits in their plea for non-violence in the struggle against injustice and for social ideals. Buskes acted as King's guide while he was in Amsterdam and helped him out when necessary.

Among the other honorary doctors in the photograph, Dr King in his borrowed gown is the only one not dressed to the nines. It shows that for Dr King, a person's inner character was more important in life than externals such as race, skin colour and status. I asked Jan van Butselaar how people reacted to the award ceremony for the honorary doctorate in the Concertgebouw on 20 October 1965. His reply: 'It was an excessively formal occasion. Prince Bernhard was handsomely dressed in white tie. He looked picture perfect. Next to him, the simply attired minister appeared to have a look of "who am I to receive this honour" ... The contrast between Dr King and Prince Bernhard was enormous ... The difference in appearance between MLK and Prince Bernhard: the Prince tall, magnificently dressed, with his family and whole entourage around him. King presented quite a different picture: of small stature, black, and with only one friend in attendance.'

A few of the interviewed alumni attended the Dies Natalis celebrations in Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky on 21 October 1965,

where Dr King gave a very impressive speech. Mr Wiersema remembers: 'The students were struck dumb ... He spoke with thunderous voice, and to many of us it felt almost like a religious experience. Dr King made a formidable impression. Everyone was stunned.' That was the real Martin Luther King: on the one hand, there was the extreme modesty in his external manner, while on the other, he exuded an inner power and zeal through the timbre of his voice and the stunning choice of words he used to communicate his mission of non-violence.

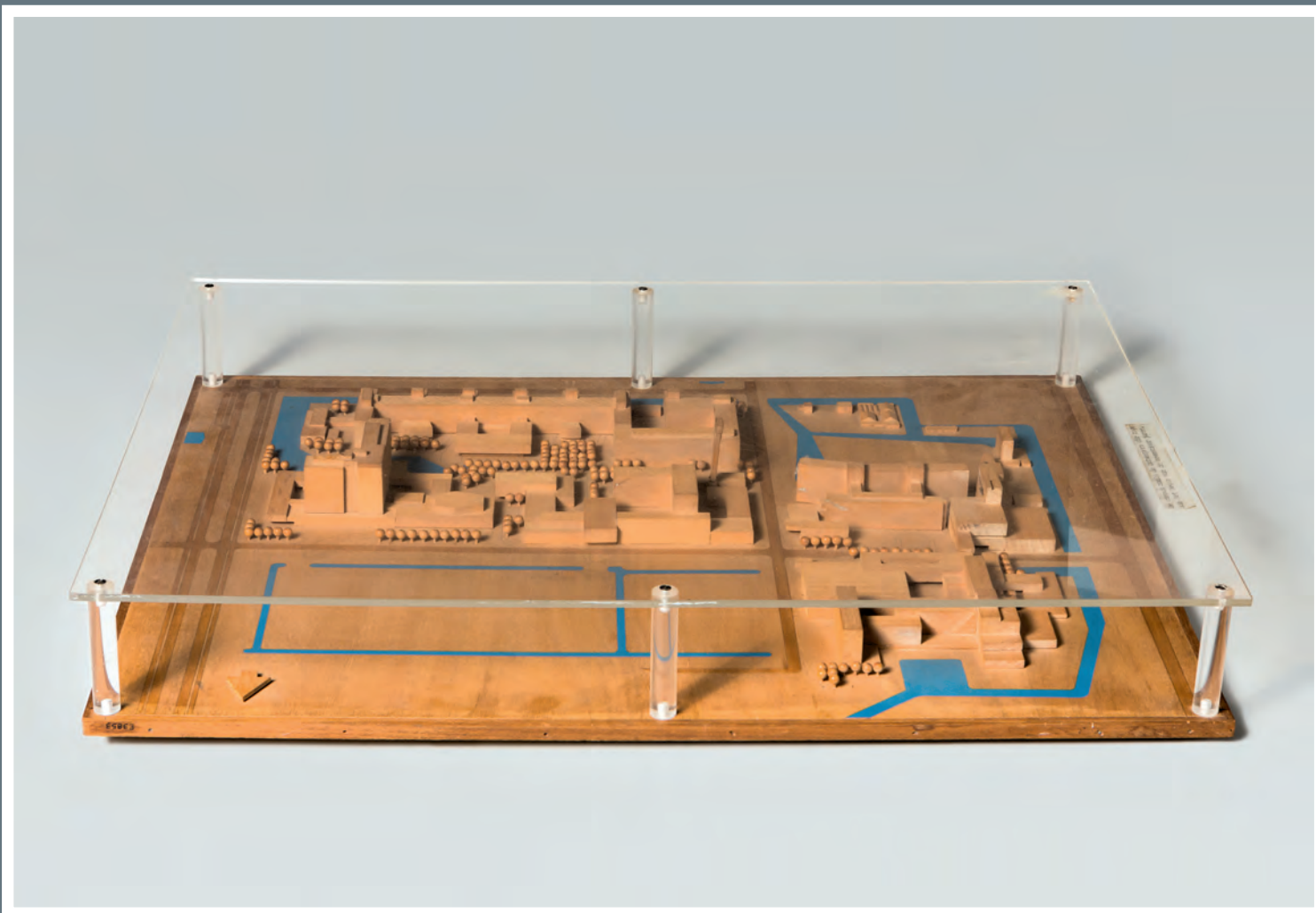
Even in 2021, the inner power and words of Dr King's speech have not lost their magic and still inspire our community. Current research has shown that modesty and successful leadership often go hand in hand. Dr King's famous 'I Have a Dream' speech (Washington DC, 1963) reveals how much he prized inner qualities over external appearance: 'I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.'

*Sylvia van de Bunt is Co-Director of SERVUS and Associate Professor at the School of Business and Economics.*



▲ Reception after the Dies Natalis, 20 October 1965 in the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. From left to right: G. Parkes (filling in for P. Hoffman), E. Jonckheer, Queen Juliana, Martin Luther King, Prince Bernhard, J. Ellul and C. Rijnsdorp.





▲ Architektengroep 69, Scale model of the VU Campus, around 1970.

Between 1955 and 1995, VU Amsterdam gradually moved from the city centre and Oud-Zuid areas to the Buitenveldert campus. The dynamic between lack of money and lack of space made for constant tension governing the campus design. The heritage collection holds various scale models, and photos of lost scale models, which bear silent witness to the developments. Architecture historian Freek Schmidt evaluates the history of the campus.

In 1953, VU Amsterdam purchased a parcel of land in the then still empty Buitenveldert area. At first it was intended for the Academic Hospital, but later also for faculties and departments. The student population continued to grow: from 2,000 in 1953 to 10,000 in 1973, when the current Main Building was officially opened. Today, student numbers have reached almost 30,000. Such growth, in addition to changing ambitions, has resulted in constant changes to the campus.

This scale model made for Architektengroep 69 represents 'all the buildings' of VU Amsterdam on a scale of 1:1,000. In the foreground at the left, the playing fields are where they have been ever since. To the right is the extension of the outpatient clinic and behind it the VU hospital. The large rectangular site beyond the playing fields is filled by the Main Building, including the Aula, and in the background the complete science building, with the adjoining medical faculty to the right. If you study the scale model carefully and compare it with how the campus actually looks now, a number of things stand out. Some buildings have disappeared, others have taken their place. The most noticeable is the gamma building, which was never constructed. From 1966 until 2001, this was the site of the Provisorium I. The Transitorium constructed in 1976 still stands today.

Looking at the general outline of the campus, we see that campus design in the first forty years was fixated on constructing sturdy buildings made up of large-scale geometric volumes, while the public space in between was redesigned every so often, from pedestrian walkways with small green spaces to parking lots.

Attempts were made not very long ago to turn this 'spare zone' into the heart of the campus, even though the demand for more teaching facilities again forced the construction of somewhat incongruous temporary buildings that did not really contribute to the overall feel.

The last two decades have seen the vanished Provisorium I being replaced by buildings that are somewhat different in their architectural form from those of previous generations. This is certainly true for the new university building, in front of which the De Boelelaan now makes an extra turn and which boasts an enormous inner atrium, or covered open area, something that the first-generation buildings had totally refused to sacrifice any interior space to. An even greater deviation in terms of its architecture is the 'bell pepper' – the building without an entrance is what I like to call it – which emphatically differentiates itself from the plain rectilinear structure and solid appearance of its predecessors.

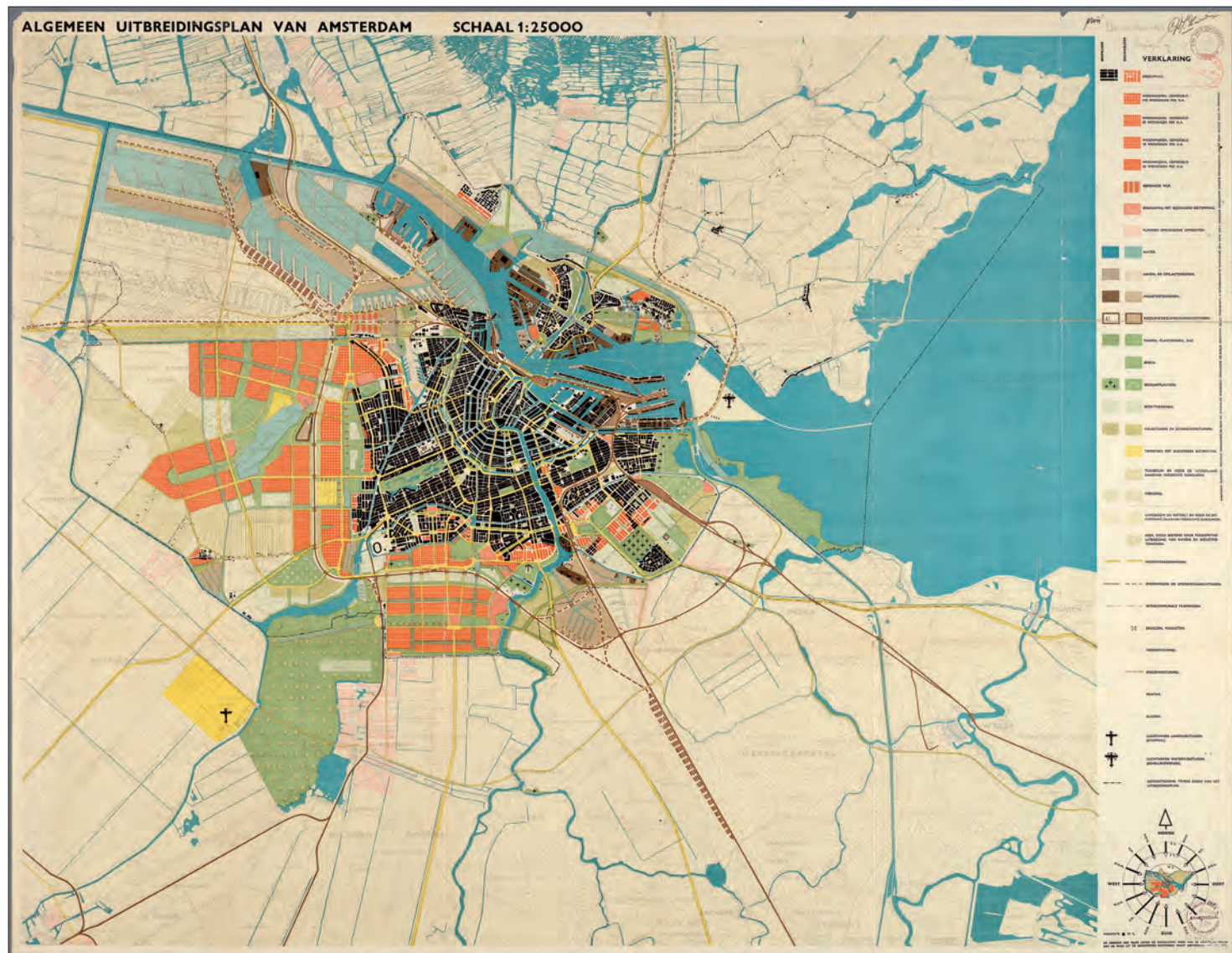
The campus will be changing again in the near future, and have to seek a good balance between the construction of new buildings and the sustainable management of existing ones. The issue of heritage will also play an important role. Although it is clear that not everyone will be able to see the charm of the existing campus architecture, it represents more than half a century of academic endeavour, with all the ambitions, dreams and experiences that accompany it, and which bestows considerable cultural historical value on the campus in its current shape.

*Freek Schmidt is Professor of History of Architecture and the Living Environment at the Faculty of Humanities.*



▲ The VU Campus under construction, with a part of the science building that was completed in 1964.





▲ The General Expansion Plan of Amsterdam [Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan van Amsterdam or AUP], 1934; design by urban planner Cornelis van Eesteren, head of the Urban Development Section of the Public Works Department. The planned city districts are indicated in orange. In the 'garden city' of Buitenveldert to the south, the new VU campus was to be built from the 1950s.

## 1970-1975 | The Film entitled *Occupied* and the 100-hour Occupation of 1972

In the 1970s, universities around the world were faced with an empowered generation of student activists. For example, in 1972 the Main Building of VU Amsterdam experienced a lengthy occupation by students demanding more democracy. Activists were also critical of the way the university's Christian principles worked out. The documentary film *Bezet [Occupied]* on the subject has been included in the heritage collection and offers some insight into the occupation and spirit of the times. Former activist and campus occupier Jochum de Graaf looks back.

On Tuesday, 22 February 1972, a few hundred students occupied the administrative wing of the yet-to-be-completed Main Building. The activists were protesting the nomination procedure for new members of the University Council, which – in their view – underrepresented students and required each member to endorse the university's Christian purpose. The occupation lent a major impulse to the progressive student movement and attracted support from other sections, staff members and the technical and administrative staff (Tas). That first evening, I remember the tea ladies pitching in to help serve meals and staff from the Technical Services department helping maintain order by going on guard duty. After more than four days of meetings, consultations, negotiations, threatening police intervention and a compromise involving postponement of the nomination deadline, the occupation was finally called off on Saturday, 26 February. Democratisation and open debate on the university's purpose have been a permanent priority ever since.

The 100-hour occupation, as it eventually became known, marked a turning point in the development of the radical student movement at VU Amsterdam. The protest was initiated by the SRVU, the 'political union' that had recently been taken over by activists from the Rode Eenheden [Red Units] comprised of Marxist students, especially from the social sciences. This notion of a political trade union linking interest groups to the anti-capitalist struggle had been fleshed out by several student

councils at the initiative of the ASVA, in the summer of 1971, with the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) operating in the background. The ideological influence on the Dutch student movement of Albert Benschop and other prominent leaders of the occupation, such as Ton Kee and Marius Ernsting, has always remained somewhat underexposed. In his *Autobiography of a Babyboomer*, Pim Fortuyn, who later embellished his role as self-appointed chair of the occupation council, wrote that they had 'stuck it to the ASVA, with their endless stories of the Maagdenhuis occupation'.

The occupation was followed by a series of other protests, as Peter Bak describes in his historical work *Gedonder in de sociale* [Hassle in the socio]: 'The Faculty of Sociocultural Sciences proved to be the most revolutionary of all, with extended occupations, endless council meetings and bitter fights over appointments.' Still, it was also an exciting time. We joined forces with *Pharetra* and successfully filed an injunction against the Executive Board, which was refusing to let us have an address file for our anniversary issue because we had published an advance copy of Jan Wolkers's novel *De Walgvoegel*.

As time went by, the radical student movement increasingly struggled to balance its commitment to parliamentary procedures with its anti-capitalist struggle. The SRVU later admitted that it had much too long persisted in the futile struggle against the 1,000-guilder tuition fee. The VU student movement





▲ Still from the film *Bezetting* ['Occupied', 1972] by Arie van Genderen for the SRVU. The sign reads: 'for a University Council as highest deciding body. Debate!! The base as well.' ('base' referring to the founding principles of VU Amsterdam).



increasingly aligned itself with the Dutch Communist Party (CPN), and several 100-hour occupiers took up positions in the party. Elli Izeboud, leader of the 'recreation team' that kept up revolutionary spirits during the occupation with all sorts of creative fight songs, would later become the CPN chairperson who led the party into the fusion that would be named GroenLinks [Green Left].

The presence of revolutionary students at the Anti-Revolutionary university led to new clashes and conflicts, especially over the university's identity. Many VU governors regarded the rebellious students as stray sheep who were always welcome to return to the fold. This certainly applied to SRVU and CPN member Victor Rutgers, who hailed from a distinguished VU family. At the same time, Rector Magnificus I.A. Diepenhorst railed against the idea of admitting CPN members to the University Council: 'The animal protection society would hardly appoint the cat snatcher as its secretary.'

Looking back on the period, activists of the early 1970s mainly recall their successful efforts to chip away at the bastion of the university's 'hypocritical and undemocratic administrative structure'.

*Jochum de Graaf studied sociology at VU Amsterdam from 1970 to 1978. Until his retirement in 2018, he worked as project manager at the foundation Stichting Burgerschapskunde, the Institute for Public Policy and Politics, and ProDemos House for Democracy and the Rule of Law, where he was responsible for the StemWijzer (a Dutch voting advice application) from its inception in 1989.*



▲ Main Building Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1978.



▲ Student protest 'towards a democratic university', 1976.





▲ The Paedological Institute, Vossiusstraat 56, 1970s.



VU Amsterdam has had a Professor of Pedagogy (education) since 1926. Originally within the Faculty of Arts, later in the Faculty of Social Sciences and then in its own faculty, and now in the Faculty of Behavioural and Human Movement Sciences. The Paedological Institute (PI) played an instrumental role not only academically at VU Amsterdam, but also in youth care services generally. In the 1970s, it led efforts to professionalise the field. The photograph of its playroom bears witness to this. Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden and John Exalto outline the developments.

In 1926 VU Amsterdam appointed its first Professor of Pedagogy (education), Jan Waterink (1890-1966). Later he also taught Psychology. Though similar posts already existed at other universities, Waterink was the only one of this first generation of psychologists and educationalists to concentrate on special education. In 1927, he established the psycho-technical laboratory, and shortly afterwards the Paedological Institute, which opened its doors in January 1931. Paedology means the study of the child. Created to forge strong links between scientific research and care services, the Institute did precisely that. Its laboratory fulfilled an important role in administering tests to children. Later on, education and psychology students also trained there.

The PI in many respects played a pioneering role in youth care services in the 1970s, when professionalization and quality of care were primary concerns. Individual treatment plans became the norm and much work was done on method development. Central to all of this was the 'playroom' (see picture on page 83). The PI had had a playroom since about 1950. Its emphasis was on treatment through play, for instance to help children remove inner obstacles. The main candidates for such treatment were children diagnosed as neurotic. Key features included a doll's house, blocks, dress-up collection, sandbox and water basin.

After 1975, the playroom's function changed in two ways. First, it became a fixed part of treatment. Instead of serving mainly to

help children deal with inner obstacles, the playroom was now deemed useful for every child. Additionally, to better facilitate treatments at the Institute, the focus shifted to fostering a good relationship between the child and care provider. Psychologists took over this task from play therapists. As one child who visited the playroom at scheduled intervals in the 1970s recalled: 'I regularly went to the psychologist's playroom to play. I loved going, and she bought special building sets because I liked them so much.'

Another development that came to define the whole period after 1975 was the playroom becoming central to diagnostics. A one-way screen enabled professionals to observe a child at play without their knowing it. Older children did realise this. In an interview, one former pupil said of this: 'During school-time, I was regularly (that is, one hour twice a week) called away for play therapy under the supervision of Titia Hoeksema. It was fantastic! Sometimes I could play freely. I liked the doll's house best, but other times I was instructed to choose a different toy. Titia looked through a one-way screen from time to time, but she also often played with me. Say, if I wanted to play dress-up, Titia let me put a wig on her.'

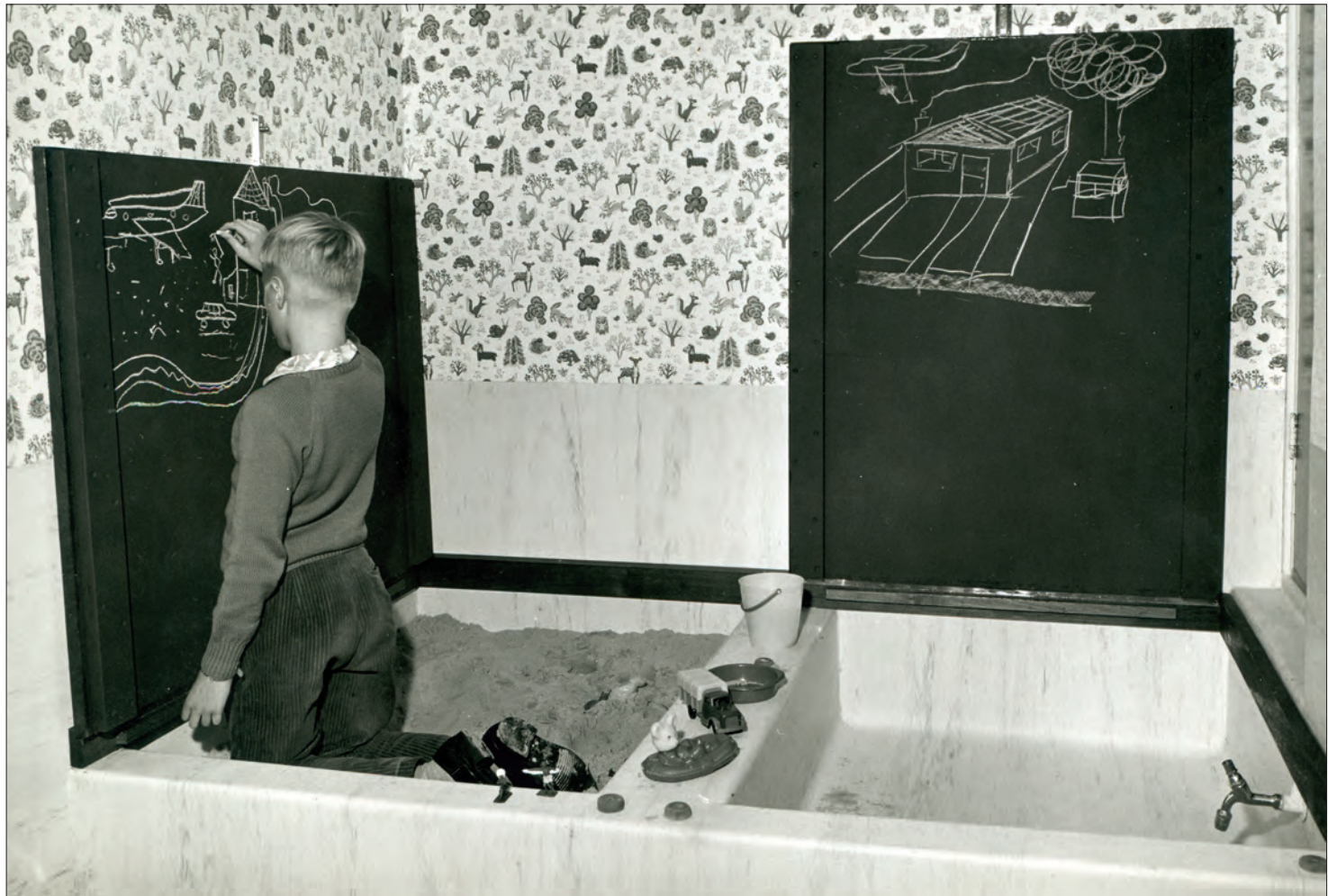
These days, a playroom and one-way screen are integral to youth care services, whether residential or ambulatory. One thing that has changed is that it is now rare for children to be placed in care homes, or longer than strictly necessary. Starting

from the 1980s, many homes for children closed their doors. The PI could continue its work due to the specialised nature of the care provided and its certification as a youth psychiatric clinic in 1989. In 2004, it merged with several other youth psychiatric care organisations to form De Bascule. More recently, De Bascule and Spirit joined in Levvel.

*Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden was Assistant Professor History of Education until her retirement. John Exalto is Assistant Professor History of Education at the Faculty of Behavioural and Human Movement Sciences.*

▼ Jacob Eriks, *Jan Waterink*, 1951, Oil on canvas, 98,5 x 78,5 cm. Portrait on the occasion of his twenty-fifth anniversary as a professor.





▲ The playing room. Drawing is an activity that lets children express things they are unable to articulate in words. For therapists, it is a means to get to know a child better and so help them.



## 1980-1985 | The Commemorative Medal and the Centennial Celebration

Like all universities, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam celebrates its anniversaries with commemorations and festivities. These celebrations are often especially lavish in milestone years, such as the fiftieth anniversary in 1930, when VU Amsterdam awarded honorary doctorates for the first time. The centenary in 1980 was celebrated very lavishly, and various objects in the collection, including a special commemorative medal, are reminders of this. The anniversary year 2020 was dedicated to Abraham Kuyper, as it marked a century since his death. Organizer Jacob Bouwman reflects on the Kuyper Year and the lasting relevance of Kuyper.

### The centennial celebration in 1980

VU Amsterdam's Dies Natalis anniversary celebration was held in October 1980 in a symbolic place: the Nieuwe Kerk on Dam square, where the founding meeting had taken place a century earlier. The event was attended by Queen Beatrix, and no fewer than nine honorary doctorates were awarded, including to journalist and publicist H. Algra (social sciences) and to physician-pharmacist S. Kruyt from Surabaya (medicine). Fiep Kruyt was the first woman to be awarded an honorary doctorate by VU Amsterdam.

But the festivities had been going on for a whole year. In October 1979, a silver lime tree was planted (which is still on the campus today). During the academic year 1979-1980 a parade was held, a play was performed and a festival was organised. The year was concluded with a performance by the VU Orchestra and VU Choir in the Concertgebouw. There were also several conferences on topics such as the purpose of VU Amsterdam, ICT and employment, and exhibitions on Kuyper as well as on plants from the Bible, with live plants and landscapes around the Aula in the Main Building.

Many commemorative objects and products were made as well, from beer and liqueur to mugs and jugs, flags and clogs, and teaspoons and painted decorative plates. The commemorative

medal was designed by sculptor Ger Zijlstra (1943). It is comprised of two bronze disks, each with a small hole in the middle. One of them bears the number 1 and so together they form the number 100. The overlap of the two circles stands for continuity, with the fully round one representing the completed past, and the partially round one representing the new, unfinished period ahead. The vertical line of the 1 stands for contrast and progressiveness. Staff and students could purchase the medal for 40 guilders.



▲ Ger Zijlstra, Commemorative medal for the VU Centenary, Amsterdam, 1979.

## The Kuyper Year 2020-2021

*Jacob Bouwman*

The celebration of VU Amsterdam's 140th anniversary coincides with the first centenary of its founder's death on 8 November 1920. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this Kuyper Year had to be organised largely online. Kuyper's enduring significance is centred on three key themes: entrepreneurship, diversity and democracy. The aim is to highlight not only his importance for the university, but also his national and international significance. Oddly enough, Kuyper is better known in North America and Southeast Asia than in the Netherlands.

Rector Magnificus Vinod Subramaniam put together a steering committee that ensured this broad view. In addition to the Rector, this group included Kuyper expert George Harinck, Amsterdam municipal council member Don Ceder, Islamic theologian Anne Dijk and education law professor Renée van Schoonhoven. Kathleen Ferrier, President of the UNESCO Commission, was asked to serve as chair. As a politician, Ferrier was inspired by Kuyper's words that governing is very different from administering. She had previously been involved with VU Amsterdam through a foundation that promotes the ideas of honorary doctor Martin Luther King, Jr in the Netherlands in the fight against discrimination. Martin Luther King, Jr was presented with an honorary doctorate by Rector Magnificus W.F. De Gaay Fortman in 1965.

At the opening of the academic year, his granddaughter Marry de Gaay Fortman, a senior executive and VU alumna, recalled how refugees – including her ancestors – were welcomed in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. They were granted a ten-year tax exemption for businesses they began in order to be able to secure a good position in the Netherlands. Queen Máxima, who was the Dies keynote speaker, also addressed entrepreneurship. Turning ideas into social values, in collaboration with small and medium-sized

enterprises is desperately needed now that the coronavirus has plunged the economy into crisis. Her message was that students, universities and small business owners should jointly work towards this goal.

During the Kuyper Year, VU Amsterdam was encouraging entrepreneurship by presenting the Kuyper Award. Students were invited to submit their business plans and three of them were then nominated to receive additional guidance. This was an exciting journey of discovery for students and the university. For example, some nominees were not allowed by their landlord to start a business at their room address and the university did not allow students to use the university's address. But all this has changed in the Kuyper Year. So in addition to starting the first political party, a newspaper, a church and a university, Kuyper's initiatives continue to create social value a century after his death. That can certainly be called unflagging entrepreneurship.

*Jacob Bouwman is organising secretary of the Kuyper Year Steering Committee and senior programme director at the new University Relations and Fundraising Department (Dienst Universitaire Relaties en Fondsenwerving, DURF).*





▲ The newly planted silver lime tree, at the official start of the VU Amsterdam centennial, 22 October 1979.



▲ Rector Magnificus H. Verheul during the Dies Natalis, 20 October 1980 in the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam.



▲ Monique Eller and Bodine Koopmans, *Nick and Carst*, Colour photo, 2016.

Among the many research institutes, departments and groups of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, a special place is occupied by the Netherlands Twin Register. In the collections, too, the department has a special place since it is represented here by a work of art. Art curator Wende Wallert and NTR founder Dorret Boomsma tell us more.

### DOUBLE DUTCH

*Wende Wallert*

In 2016, photographers Monique Eller and Bodine Koopmans made a series of portraits about twins entitled DOUBLE DUTCH, in collaboration with the NTR and VU Amsterdam. The results of their work were displayed in an exhibition in the Main Building. Set against a muted background, the portrait of Nick and Carst beautifully reveals their similarities and differences as well as the special bond that twins share. VU Amsterdam aims to stimulate the interaction between art and science. Like science, art offers us new insights, but from the imagination. In its own gallery space called WONDER, VU Amsterdam organises exhibitions and events to share current artistic and scientific research with the public.

*Wende Wallert is curator of the VU Amsterdam Art Collection.*

### The Netherlands Twin Register

*Dorret Boomsma*

I began my PhD studies at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1983 after completing a doctoral programme there and obtaining an MA at the Institute for Behavioural Genetics in Boulder,

Colorado. It was in Boulder that I became excited about the value of twin studies. Together with my supervisor, Professor Orlebeke, we invited twins and triplets between the ages of thirteen and twenty to participate along with their parents in a study on the genetics of cardiovascular risk factors. We obtained their addresses with the help of the city council registry of Amsterdam, but it soon became clear that it would be very expensive to recruit really large groups of twins for genetics research by that route. We therefore decided to set up our own twin register at VU Amsterdam. This became the Netherlands Twin Register (NTR). We currently have around 70,000 sets of twins and about the same number of family members registered. In other words, the NTR is a twin-family register.

We started with two groups: young adults (and their parents and siblings) and newborn twins and triplets. Professor Orlebeke lived next door to the director of a baby congratulation service. This organisation would visit young parents and the NTR was allowed to hand out a leaflet inviting the parents of young twins to register.

Information on development, health, fertility, lifestyle, cognitive skills and personality comes mainly from the questionnaires, which are sent to participants every few years. Teachers of young twins also participate and provide information about children from multiple births and their siblings in the school setting. In addition, there are dedicated projects that collect data on traits like IQ, blood pressure and brain functions. The NTR-BIOBANK project started around 2004. In this project, biological material (including blood) was collected from 10,000



participants and then used to isolate DNA and RNA and to measure biomarkers ranging from cholesterol to telomere length. For years, NTR staff have been making early morning visits to participants in their homes.

All these measurements and findings can be used to investigate the classic question at the heart of twin research: what explains differences between people? Does the explanation lie in our environment or in our DNA? More than thirty years of NTR research shows that the answer is not either-or, but both. There are almost no human characteristics in which our genome does not play a role. In recent years, there has also been increasing interest in the dependence of genes on the environment. The environment in which people live or the environment they seek is not random, but influenced by their genome.

The combination of twin family research with DNA data collected over several generations has proved invaluable in questions of intergenerational transmission and in predictions based on genetic information. We can still learn a great deal in this regard from identical twins in particular. Identical, or monozygotic, twins are born from a single fertilised egg that splits a few days after fertilisation. This leads to two, or sometimes even three or four, individuals with the same genome. So when it comes to characteristics that are strongly related to DNA information, such as appearance – see the photo of Nick and Carst – identical twins tend to be very similar. Because they have (almost) the same DNA, they thus have identical risk profiles for diseases and disorders. But research on identical twins actually shows that genetic determinism does not exist: the same genotype does not necessarily lead to the same outcome in terms of health or behaviour. The differences within sets of identical twins are the best estimate we have for the limits of predictability.

The participation of children from identical and fraternal multiple births, the participation of adult twins and their family members, all of whom have selflessly taken part in NTR research over the past three decades, has produced a database of longitudinal data that is the only one of its kind in the world.

*Dorret Boomsma is Professor of Biological Psychology and founder of the Netherlands Twin Register.*



▲ Pinar Yoldas, *Cytopia*, 2018. After the completion of the new O|2 building, VU Amsterdam asked Yoldas to create a work of art that depicts research in the field of Human Health and Life Sciences. She arrived at the essence of research: cell division. This resulted in a cuddly and airy work of art that stimulates the senses. Her cell in ice cream colours 'floats' over the back wall of the auditorium, near the entrance of the building.

## 1990-1995 | The Reading Board: the first Advertising Campaign

In 1992, VU Amsterdam launched the advertising campaign 'These times call for a Vrije Universiteit'. Part of this was a student recruitment campaign using the traditional Dutch *leesplankje* [reading board] with illustrations by Cornelis Jetses, in which the old words – *Aap*, *Noot*, *Mies*, etc. – were combined with contemporary images. The campaign was a success and ran for over ten years, introducing new images every year. These were linked to specific degree programmes, such as *Noot* (a walnut) for Psychology, *Vuur* (fire – a space shuttle taking off) for Physics and Astronomy and *Weide* (parched meadow) for Earth Sciences.

The campaign was VU Amsterdam's first university-wide advertising campaign and one of the first in the Netherlands. Incidentally, VU Amsterdam already had more experience than other universities with 'propaganda', as it was called then. This was aimed at those who supported the university financially. As early as the 1930s, a film was made offering scenes from everyday life at VU Amsterdam, shown at recruitment evenings throughout the country. Later on, the Student General Counselling Service provided information about the programmes on a small scale, and from the mid-1970s a science communicator was employed. These activities led to the establishment of the Information & External Relations Office, which gradually transformed the traditional information service into profiling and recruitment.

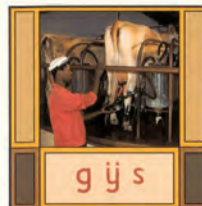
It is no coincidence that the first major recruitment campaign was launched in the 1990s. This was the decade in which the traditional steady flow of students to VU Amsterdam and other universities, which had surged from the 1960s onwards, stabilized. As Dutch universities were increasingly funded based on student numbers, recruitment also became financially important. Within the university itself, however, there was quite a bit of resistance: wasn't advertising the business of soapmakers rather than of academic institutions? After all, good wine needs no bush.

Nonetheless, an important first step in this development had already been taken in 1989. In cooperation with design agency BRS Premsela Vonk, a new VU emblem was developed: the blue griffin. This mythical creature with the lower body of a lion, the head and wings of an eagle and the ears of a horse brought unity to and became emblematic of the corporate identity. This was not static, but it was distinctive. The different animal parts refer to the different scientific disciplines, which is stylistically expressed in a 'classically' designed body (arts and humanities), a 'mathematically' designed head (natural sciences) and freely designed wings (social sciences). The griffin looks back, as he is aware of tradition. He stands with all four feet on the ground of experience, yet combines this with 'the flight of the imagination'.

The campaign with the reading board, developed in cooperation with Campaign Company, also took VU Amsterdam's own identity as a starting point. The reading board – traditional, but combined with modern images – connected past and present. The campaign was large-scale, with an emphasis on outdoor advertising: posters were placed in bus shelters and on billboards, and covered buses and trams. Daily newspaper ads supported the campaign. Support within the university grew: the campaign was playful, and moreover it offered both unity – the concept of the reading board – and the possibility to highlight degree programmes separately, with endless variations. There was also



## Deze tijd vraagt om een Vrije Universiteit



▲ The reading board with the slogan: 'These times call for a Vrije Universiteit', 1997.

praise from the advertising world: in 1998, the campaign won an important advertising award, a silver 'Effie'.

The campaign became strongly associated with the image of VU Amsterdam and was repeated several times. It was only in 2003 that it was followed by the 'More perspective' campaign, with the recurring theme 'You know more if you broaden your mind', which was considered more suitable for an international profile. In this campaign, sentences or images were given a different meaning by adding an extra word or image placed 'outside the box'. Between 2011 and 2018, the slogan 'Looking further' took centre stage. Since 2018, VU Amsterdam has used the slogan 'Change your world', with the most striking image being a croquette that turns out to be a kiwi inside, accompanied by the text 'Change fast-food'. All this is coordinated by Communications & Marketing, which in three decades has grown into the central department responsible for positioning the university and all corporate communications.



◀ VU Amsterdam advertising campaign: 'You know more if you broaden your mind', 2003.



▲ VU Amsterdam advertising campaign: 'Change your world', 2018.





▲ Clap skate with measuring equipment, workshop AMC, Amsterdam, 1995-1996.

The clap skate is one of the most widely known inventions to be developed by a VU Amsterdam researcher. In fact, it came to revolutionise the sport of skating after years of research, testing and initial hesitation. The work was done within the field of human movement sciences, a unique scientific field that has come to define the university's profile. A lookback at this process and an overview of current skating research by researchers Peter Beek, Jaap van Dieën and Jeroen Smeets.

### The clap skate

VU Amsterdam has been conducting research on human movement biomechanics since the establishment of the Interfaculty of Physical Education in 1971. The principal architect of this research was Gerrit Jan van Ingen Schenau (1944-1998), who was ultimately appointed Professor of Biomechanics at the then Faculty of Human Movement Sciences. While his initial research involved the biomechanics of walking, one of his students introduced him to the study of skating. Van Ingen Schenau and his team measured human movements and the corresponding forces in an attempt to gain insight into human energy production and the use of this energy in cyclic movements.

On the back of his physiological research into muscle function and control, particularly of the calf muscle, Van Ingen Schenau's enthusiasm for speed skating resulted in the development of the 'clap skate' in the mid-1980s. The definitive design was preceded by several prototypes. This process involved the development of measuring skates, which were used to study the mechanics of skating. One of the first measurement models, used to measure the force exerted by skaters when pushing off the ice, dates back to 1978. This skate still has fixed blades similar to those on the measuring skates developed from 1985 to 1988 as part of Jos de Koning's doctoral research.

Researchers developed the idea for the clap skate in collaboration with instrument makers at the Academic Medical

Center. The skates were tested on a larger scale as part of a trial with the South Holland youth team during the 1994-1995 skating season. Dutch professional ice skaters Tonny de Jong, Carla Zijlstra and Barbara de Loor were the first to use the new skates in 1996, in the face of widespread initial scepticism. However, skaters using the new clap skates at the 1998 Nagano Olympics broke world records in almost every distance.

The skate shown here is a 1996-1997 model. The wires connected to a small computer on the skater's back, which stored data from measuring devices that could then be read at a later time.

## Current developments

*Peter Beek, Jaap van Dieën and Jeroen Smeets*

Human movement scientists have continued to research skating since Van Ingen Schenau's pioneering work. Jeroen van der Eb resumed development of the measuring skate at the department in 2018. The existing measuring skates still needed some further improvements in order to be suitable for professional skating. The 'old' generation of measuring skates was too heavy for professional skaters due to their built-in sensors and electronics. Also, these older models did not include the actual clap-mechanism.

Van der Eb resolved this problem with the help of technicians, producing a lighter version of the measuring skate with the clapping mechanism. All participants in trials with the new skate were enthusiastic about its handling and were able to achieve high speeds without any problems. The new skate model integrates all built-in electronics into the bridge between blade and shoe. This will allow for reliable measurement of the forces affecting the foot, skate and ice surface, enabling researchers to gain an even better understanding of the biomechanics of skating, especially at high speed. The measurement skate will also enable researchers to analyse the effects of any changes to the skating technique and configuration of the skate (curvature, type of blade). Skate manufacturer Viking can also use measurement data to develop even better skates for the market.

A follow-up project involving the measuring skate won the 2020 National Sports Innovation Award, an award for the most innovative products in the field of sports, professional athletics and physical activity. As part of the project, the Netherlands' top skaters will start using the measuring skate so that the resulting data can be used to further improve their skating technique. While this could take the form of an offline analysis, it would be even better if the data generated by the measurement skates could be used to provide online feedback during the actual skating. This is the long-term goal

behind the project, which is being conducted by partners VU Amsterdam, Leiden University, the KNSB skating federation, NOC\*NSF, Innovatielab Thialf and Viking skate manufacturers.

In addition to technical knowledge, the use of online feedback also requires an understanding of the way in which feedback affects behaviour. The department is developing this knowledge in order to optimise athletic performance, for example in skating, prevent overexertion in athletics and at the workplace, and improve the well-being of patients and elderly people with mobility problems. This effort involves collaboration with future users in the fields of sports and healthcare, as well as private sector parties and developers of the measurement technologies enabling this type of feedback.

*Peter Beek, Jaap van Dieën and Jeroen Smeets are Professors at the Department of Human Movement Sciences.*





▲ Jacques Grégoire, *Gerrit Jan van Ingen Schenau*, 1998, posthumous, Oil on canvas, 110 x 90 cm.

VU Amsterdam was one of the first universities in the Netherlands to set up a Computer Science Department in the 1970s. Thanks to the American Professor Andy Tanenbaum, the department soon achieved international fame. Tanenbaum became best known for the operating system MINIX. MINIX 3, which came out in 2006, is still used in education today. Computer historian Danny Beckers outlines the development of computer science at VU Amsterdam and MINIX.

### Computer science at VU Amsterdam

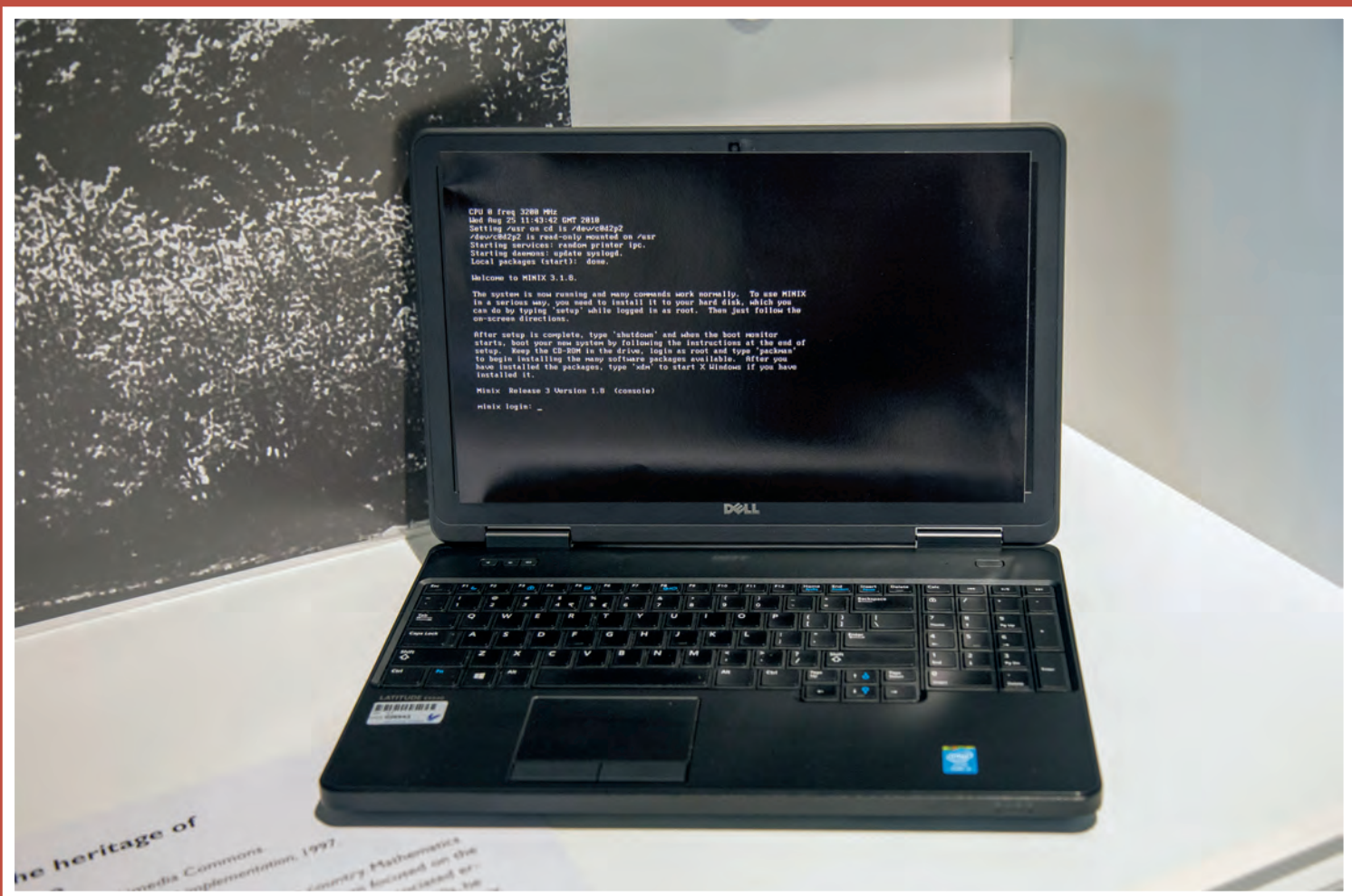
*Danny Beckers, with additions by Andy Tanenbaum*

VU Amsterdam's Computer Science Department was among the first in the country. Mathematics students could enrol in the computer science major as early as 1971. The curriculum focused on the description and development of automated numerical processes and the study of the associated error margins. Through Professor Jurjen Koksma (1904-1964), VU Amsterdam had been involved with the Mathematical Centre, now known as Centrum voor Wiskunde & Informatica (CWI [Centre for mathematics and computer science]), since the centre's foundation in 1946. It was founded on the initiative of a number of professors of mathematics, who advocated a new form of practising the discipline. With the centre, they wanted to contribute to the rebuilding of the Dutch economy. The Mathematical Centre's calculation centre was one of its essential components, and it was there that VU Amsterdam gained early knowledge of building computers. Among other things, the Mathematical Centre was involved in the design of the X1, built by the Dutch computer manufacturer Electrologica. This shows that VU Amsterdam's early involvement in computer science did not come out of the blue.

In the 1960s, VU Amsterdam staff and students performed calculations on the Mathematical Centre's machines. Many mathematics students were to enter the professional field

through the Centre. After the arrival of two professors, Reinder van de Riet and Jacob de Bakker, in 1970 and 1972 respectively, VU Amsterdam from 1973 on greatly expanded the number of courses available for mathematics students, ranging from numerical mathematics to business automation and from programming to database construction. Both professors had studied at VU Amsterdam and then worked at the Mathematical Centre for some years. In 1971, between these two professorial appointments, Andy Tanenbaum was appointed assistant professor. He was promoted to full professor in 1980. One of the courses he taught was on the design of operating systems. In the mid-1980s, he built MINIX to give students the opportunity to study these operating systems in more detail. MINIX was a smaller version of the popular operating system UNIX (MINi unIX), which had been developed by Bell Labs a few years earlier.

Computer operating systems were a relatively new phenomenon in the 1970s. While the old mainframes could be operated with a set of initial commands, the need for an operating system did not become apparent until the 1960s, when it became more common for several users to use the same computer. The computer's operating system ensured that the various programmes in use were handled efficiently, without information disappearing or processes stalling along the way. In this way, a user could print a result while the processor in the computer was busy with another calculation, for example. With the rising popularity of the PC in the early 1980s, the operating



▲ The login screen to Minix Version 3.1.8.



system took on the function of handling all the parallel processes that the PC user had started up and of which ordinary users were often no longer even aware, from screen control and word processing to clock and email programs.

In a 1987 book on operating systems, Tanenbaum used MINIX as the basis. The book came with a box of floppy disks containing MINIX, including all the source code. As an operating system, it was superseded in the market by Windows and MACOS, but as a case study at universities, MINIX continued leading the way into the 1990s, as students could study the source code and adapt it by themselves.

In addition, MINIX continued as a research project that led to six PhDs, two of whom won the Roger Needham Award for the best PhD thesis on computer systems in Europe. In 2004, the KNAW made Tanenbaum an Academy Professor, which included a grant of 1.5 million euros to continue the research on MINIX. In 2006, with MINIX version 3, the focus of the research changed toward making it fault tolerant. In 2009, the European Union recognized the importance of trying to make software reliable by giving Tanenbaum an ERC grant of 2.5 million euros to further develop the system.

*Danny Beckers works at the Faculty of Science, where he teaches and conducts research into the history of mathematics, the history of computer science and the history of mathematics education.*

## Software as a heritage object

Thanks to the digital revolution, the idea of what constitutes an object in a museum context has changed. Whereas an object used to only be something you could hold, nowadays we also have born-digital objects, such as e-books, emails and even e-art. You could also refer to software as heritage. After all, it shows as much about how the human mind thinks and develops as the hardware or the end products. But how to store such heritage in a sustainable way? And what exactly is to be stored? The code on a floppy disk or USB stick? Or on a device? How can you keep it working and accessible? Perhaps on a virtual device? Or do you, symbolically, save a screenshot or an image of the logo to illustrate a text? Fortunately, this is a widely debated issue in the heritage world. In 2003 UNESCO published the Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage, where it addresses these questions.

The next challenge is how to display software in a publication or a physical exhibition. In a digital environment, you can link to videos and background information, like we did in the online exhibition. In this book, the story will have to suffice. But how to do this in the accompanying physical exhibition? How to give the visitor a satisfying experience of this intangible object? In short: Digital heritage presents the curator with many interesting new challenges.



▲ Dial-up modem with telephone, needed to enable digital network traffic over the analog telephone line. Copy at the end of the eighties, used by VU scientists.



► Apple Macintosh Plus ED, 1987. The inscription 'VU' was applied to discourage theft of the device.



▲ VU Amsterdam Sports Centre, Uilenstede Campus, 2021.



The VU Sports Centre has been located on the Uilenstede student campus since 1966. Over time, it has been transformed from a simple sports hall into a complex with various halls and studios for many different sports. In addition, a fitness centre was opened on the campus in 2006. The same year saw the launch of the VU Fit at Work programme, a free exercise/sports programme for staff. Sport is now an integral part of university life. A look back, followed by a reflection by the current director of the VU Sports Centre Arie Koops.

### Sport in the history of VU Amsterdam

In the early days of VU Amsterdam, there were no organised student sports, and the facilities were limited to a few pieces of gymnastics equipment in the garden of the university building on Keizersgracht. That changed after World War II. In September 1945, a 'Commission for the Promotion of the Cultural and Physical Interests of Students at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam' (COSCOVU) was established – the forerunner of the later Civitasraad [Civitas Council]. In the post-war period, universities emphatically wanted to be more than institutions for the pursuit of scholarship and professional training; they wanted to focus on the broad education of their students. Studying had to go hand in hand with personality building, and students had to feel like they were part of the academic community. Both physical and cultural education could contribute to this, based on the idea that one should 'develop body and mind equally'. One of the initiatives of COSCOVU was the establishment of a Sports Association, the ASVU, on 15 November 1945.

Initially, the ASVU was closely linked to the traditional student fraternities and sororities, and events such as tournaments were organised between student society teams. As time went on, however, the Association became more and more independent, came under the leadership of a 'sports leader' and developed all kinds of activities. From 1953, the ASVU organised annual sports days in May, with individual and team sports, to

promote sports among VU students. Sports activities during this period were spread across a large number of locations in the city, such as the Cor du Buy sports centre, the Apollohal, the AMVJ sports fields in the Amsterdamse Bos and Sporthal Zuid ('the old Rai'). By the mid-1950s, the number of Association members had grown to nearly 300. Members could choose from 13 different sports: gymnastics, volleyball, basketball, field hockey, football, athletics, table tennis, swimming, rowing, tennis, judo, fencing and chess.

In the same period, VU Amsterdam developed plans for the construction of a large student centre – the later Uilenstede campus in Amstelveen – in which sports facilities were emphatically included. The student centre was built to a design by architect Leo de Jonge. On 12 October 1966, Minister I.A. Diepenhorst officially opened eight new VU buildings. The brochure published on the occasion of the opening mentioned 'a sports hall and some rooms for gymnastics, judo, fencing, table tennis, a canteen, etc.' The newspaper *Trouw* devoted a large article to the new buildings, speaking of 'a magnificent sports hall'. From then on, most ASVU activities took place in the sports centre.

The ASVU's membership had by now grown to 1,400. Only ten years later, 3,100 students were using its facilities. More and more students took to playing sports over the years, necessitating the first major renovation of the Sports Centre in 2004. In 2016, the Sports Centre was again renovated to double the number

of square metres. A fitness centre aimed primarily at staff had already been opened on the campus in 2006, in the new OZW building. The same year saw the launch of the *VU Fit at Work* programme, a free exercise/sports programme for staff.

## Sport at VU Amsterdam in the present and future

*Arie Koops*

In 2021, the idea of the gymnastics equipment in the garden from VU Amsterdam's early days has gained new relevance. With the coronavirus lockdown, outdoor sports became more topical than ever. More than 150 students, staff members and local residents used the 'fitness garden' at the Sports Centre on a daily basis.

However, this number is in stark contrast to the hundreds to thousands of visitors per day that the sports centre welcomed in 2019. After the extensive renovation in 2016, the number of visitors grew rapidly. They can play a range of over thirty different sports. The majority of visitors are active in the ultra-modern gymnasium and the many different types of aerobics classes in the three studios. The indoor football and indoor hockey competitions are also popular. In addition to buying a season ticket, it is also possible to play sports through a student sports society: volleyball, tennis, rowing, skating and cycling.

In the future, the Sports Centre wants to continue to play a central role for all students, staff and local residents when it comes to sport and exercise, based on the conviction that this contributes to physical, mental and

social well-being. Based on expected trends, a more varied sports offer will be developed in the years to come. In view of the overflowing halls in the year 2019, the increase in the number of Dutch and international students and further growth of the Uilenstede student campus, further expansion is also desirable.

In addition to these trends, the Sports Centre will need to respond to developments such as a hybrid offer (physical and online) and to the experience during and around sports, including entert(r)ainment and the organisation of events. The sports offer can be expanded by constructing padel courts that can be used for multiple purposes, facilitating mind sports, setting up e-sports facilities or constructing facilities for beach volleyball on the Uilenstede campus. The many questions concerning healthy lifestyle and nutrition will also be addressed, seeking the right balance between perspiration and relaxation.

From its origins in 1966, through steady expansion and rapid growth, particularly in the last decade, the VU Sports Centre can proudly celebrate its 55th anniversary in October 2021.

*Arie Koops is director of the VU Sports Centre.*



◀ VU students at the gymnastics equipment in the garden of Keizersgracht 162, c. 1890.

▼ Entrance Sports Centre, 2021



▼ Sports Centre at the Uilenstede student centre. 1970.





The Uilenstede campus is currently home to 3,400 students and others, including many VU Amsterdam students. There are also numerous amenities, including a sports centre, a bicycle repair shop, a supermarket, an eatery and various shops. The first flats were opened in 1966. Since that time, the complex has grown to become the largest student centre in northern Europe. Uilenstede has an illustrious history and has been extensively rebuilt and renovated on several occasions. The festive opening of the renovated campus took place on 12 May 2016. A brief outline of its history is given below, after which Duco Stadig, who lived in Uilenstede in the 1970s, looks back on his time there.

When Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was still based in the inner city and Amsterdam South, some of the students lived in so-called hospitia: student housing managed by the university. When the university decided to move to Buitenveldert in the 1950s, an initial attempt was made to build housing on the new campus, but the rapidly growing number of students made this impossible. In the end an independent student complex designed by architect Leo de Jonge was built in Amstelveen, some distance away. The first pile was driven on 26 May 1964, and Uilenstede, as the complex was named, was opened in 1966 by Minister I.A. Diepenhorst. In 1976, there were already 1,500 VU Amsterdam students and 1,000 UvA students living there, as well as 300 student nurses from the VU Amsterdam hospital. There was a sports centre and a centrally located Combination Building: a meeting centre that housed the Uilenstede café, the VU Amsterdam cultural centre and a student restaurant.

It was hoped that, despite its large scale, the student centre would retain some of the sense of security provided by the old VU Amsterdam student life. Unfortunately, the reality was different. Not only the location – a stone's throw from Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and far from the city – but also the uniformity of the buildings meant that Uilenstede was not a popular place to live. It was seen as a student ghetto and was given derogatory nicknames like Vuilenstede (a pun on its name and the Dutch word *vuil* for dirt) and Amstelveen's Manhattan. In 1980, a black

book was published with numerous complaints, varying from noise, poor-quality concrete and crumbling stairs.

The early 1990s, however, saw the beginning of a renewal. Existing buildings were renovated, housing was added and the living environment was refurbished. At the end of the 1990s, the Griffioen cultural centre arose on the site of the old Combination Building. The student housing provider SSH, responsible for management from the start, was renamed Intermezzo and later became part of DUWO. The site again became the property of the municipality of Amstelveen.

Renewal on a larger scale was initiated in 2009 on the basis of a vision developed by Lodewijk Baljon Landscape Architects, aimed at creating a green campus with space for various aspects of student life, meeting and interaction. Architectural firm NEXT renovated the central building in 2014. At the heart of the campus, a meeting place was created in the form of a central square, with a glass greenhouse – an event venue – and a catering outlet. On 12 May 2016, the renovated campus was opened with the unveiling of a plaque.



▲ Central square campus Uilenstede with meeting hall De Kas, designed by NEXT Architects, 2014.

## Memories from the 1970s

*Duco Stadig*

When I moved to Uilenstede in early 1970, the student centre – as it was called – was still under construction. The low buildings and the three low towers were already there, grouped around the pond that was there at the time. The three tall double towers were already finished or under construction, as was the ‘Combination Building’ in between. The sports hall was also there, as well as a temporary Spar supermarket and a temporary café built alongside. Much later, the UvA built three more double towers across the road.

There was a general supervisor, Mr Buitink, who assured worried parents from the provinces that there was good supervision and therefore no chance of misbehaviour by their offspring. Boys and girls lived separately, so everything was under control. However, it was the time of the sexual revolution and of the NVSH, the Dutch Society for Sexual Reform. A certain Wiebe Braam was a member, and you could get contraceptives from him, much to the dismay of Mr Buitink. More and more girls were spotted in the boys’ flats, which occasionally smelled of hashish, and some students experimented with LSD. We listened to music by the Stones, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, Bob Dylan and their contemporaries.

The rooms were grouped into ‘units’, consisting of fourteen rooms behind a front door. In the old building, we had to share showers and toilets. In the tall towers, only the kitchen was shared. And then there was the telephone; each unit had one telephone in the corridor. You couldn’t have a confidential conversation, and you had to write down the telephone units you used.

The Combination Building housed the bicycle parking facilities, a supermarket, a social club and an oversized café-restaurant. This was discovered by the youth of Amstelveen, who came there in ever-increasing numbers to party away the weekend. While this was good for turnover, they also brought

heroin and knives, so the situation got out of hand and they were no longer welcome.

We were in the flight path of Amsterdam Airport Schiphol’s ‘Bulder’ runway, which was much busier then than now. With a westerly wind, a plane would come over every few minutes. Some went crazy from the noise, others managed to ignore it. ‘When you’re having a conversation, you just stop’, I used to explain, but the radio news service didn’t stop, so that was tricky. I didn’t study much. I hardly ever went to lectures. Instead, I sat on committees and boards, including that of the SSH. I did eventually obtain my Master’s degree in Economics after twelve years, but by then I was already living elsewhere and even had a job. In those days, that was no big deal.

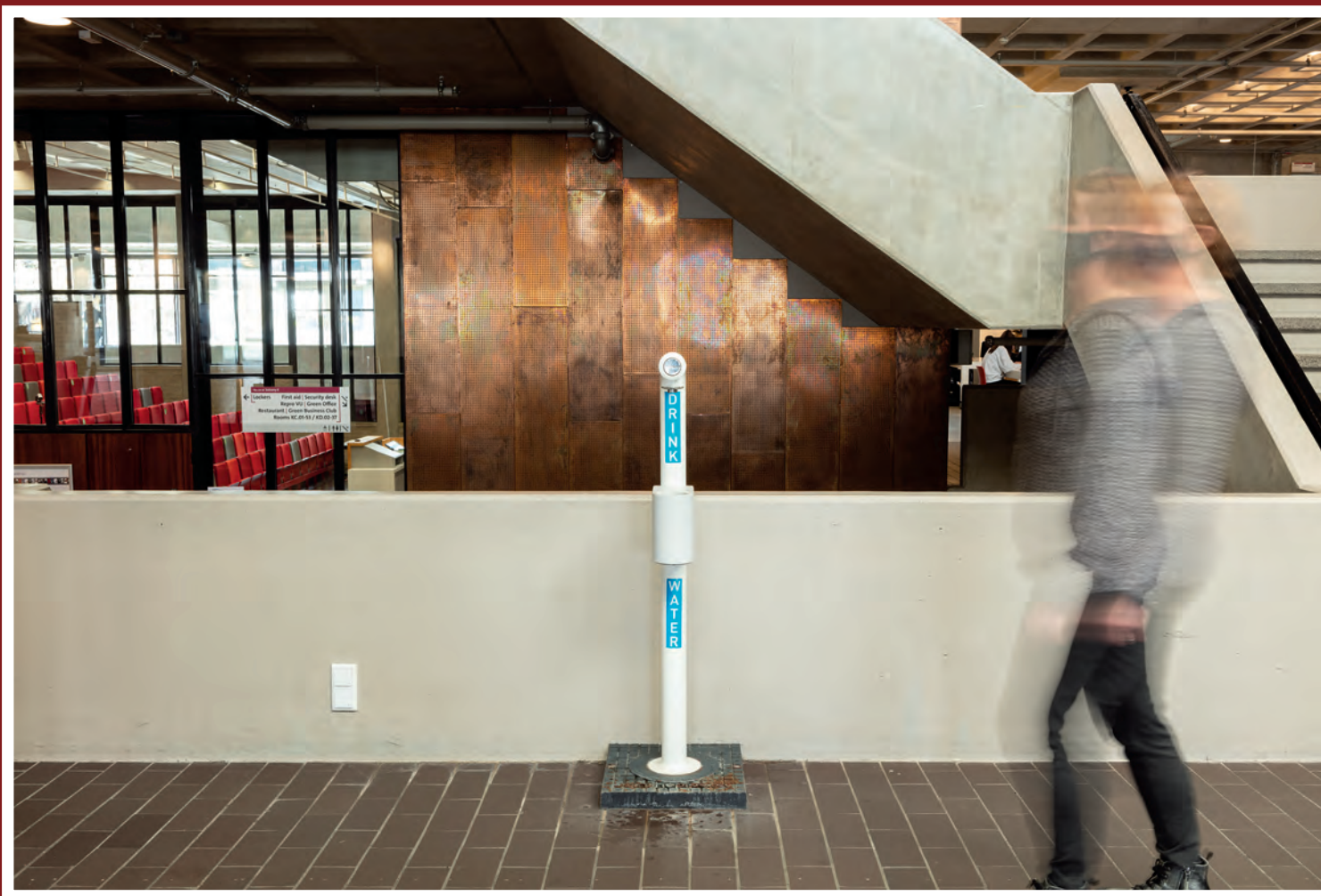
Even back then, there was a massive housing shortage in Amsterdam. That’s why there was a system of housing distribution at the time: vacant homes were allocated by the Municipal Housing Service, and if they were refused twice, they went to student housing. In 1975, at the age of 28, I was offered a house scheduled for demolition in Nicolaas Beetsstraat. However, it had been broken into by squatters, so I was offered another one on Rozengracht. I continued going to Uilenstede for a while, because I was still chair of the SSH board. Four years ago, I visited again after a long time, marvelling at everything that had changed in the intervening decades.

*Duco Stadig is a former SSH board member (1970-1977), former alderman of Amsterdam and, since 2014, board member of VUvereniging.*





▲ Scale model of student centre Uilenstede, c. 1970.



▲ The drink water tap point at the VU Amsterdam Main Building, 2020.

The Green Office at VU Amsterdam, founded in October 2014, is part of a European movement of Green offices at universities. It symbolizes the importance of sustainability for students and staff all over the world. In 2015 the Green Office began a campaign aimed at making the university PET-bottle free, and joined forces with the Campus Services to create free drink water tap points, like the one in the hall of the Main Building. Rodrigo Zapata, the current manager of the Green Office, tells about their history and their plans. Then the initiative is placed in historical perspective.

### The Green Office

*Rodrigo Zapata*

In 2010 the first Dutch Green office was opened at Maastricht University. It was an experiment, student-led and staff-supported, to put sustainability higher on the agendas of the university boards. At one point the Green Office network consisted of 29 established and 19 GO initiatives all over the continent, and it is constantly growing. The different offices yearly come together in the European Green Office Summit (EGOS). During this summit, representatives of Green Offices in Europe take part in an intensive program consisting of workshops, brainstorm sessions and lectures.

The Green Office VU was founded in 2014, when students and policy-makers agreed on the need for more awareness and initiatives on the issue of sustainability. This means that the Green Office VU was a bottom-up as well as a top-down initiative. The mission of the Office is to make a sustainable and significant impact by empowering the VU-community. They are the main sustainability platform and network at the university, where students, faculty staff and employees come together to implement joint initiatives, exchange ideas and create alliances. Their activities and projects take a broad approach to sustainability and the areas of focus include education, research, community, and outreach.

The main method of operation is partnerships and ad-hoc projects. The Green Office works together with services, teachers, researchers, and organisations outside and inside VU Amsterdam (e.g. caterers Eurest and Sodexo, the bottle maker Doppler, and the Green Business Club Zuidas Amsterdam). The Green Office is formally part of the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute and collaborates with all levels at the main services and faculties, including the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM), especially in the development of teaching materials.

One of the projects in the last few years was the Join the Pipe program, part of the wish to make VU Amsterdam the first PET-bottle free campus of Europe by 2018. This has not been fully realized, but serious steps have been made. With Campus Services several tap points have been set up, and an awareness campaign has been developed. The PET Free action was started together with the other Green Offices in Amsterdam, which was an interesting and useful cooperation, for future actions also.

*Rodrigo Zapata is the manager of the Green Office.*



## VU Amsterdam and sustainability in historical perspective

The creation of the Green Office is in line with the current emphasis on sustainability at VU Amsterdam, which is also reflected in the profile theme 'Science for sustainability'. This theme covers numerous educational and research initiatives, including minors, an honours course and summer school, and groups such as the Environmental Humanities Center and the Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Sustainable Development.

The focus on 'going green' has a long history at VU Amsterdam. In 1970, a committee was set up to explore the possibility of studying 'environmental issues'. A year later, on 9 December 1971, the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) was opened. Other universities started pursuing environmental research in the 1970s as well, but VU Amsterdam distinguished itself from the outset with its multidisciplinary and sometimes interdisciplinary approach. All faculties were asked to contribute, as the university realised that environmental issues not only involve the natural sciences, but also have economic, medical, social, political, legal and theological aspects. The IVM's first research projects arose from requests received by the Faculty of Economics (from the Ministry of Public Health and Environmental Protection, and from the World Wildlife Fund) for research on the economic costs of environmental pollution. One such project focused on traffic nuisance near buildings in Amsterdam-West, in which the reduced quality of life was also quantified in economic terms.

At the time of its founding, the institute introduced itself in publications such as *VU-Magazine*, loosely connecting its remit to the identity and origins of VU Amsterdam. Reference was made to Abraham Kuyper, for instance, who in 1879 had already called for government measures to combat air, soil and water pollution as part of the ARP's political programme, stating that research should be conducted into this pollution as well.

In any case, the establishment of the IVM fitted in with VU Amsterdam's identity in the 1970s, which revolved around service to society. The IVM's research remained closely linked to society in the years that followed: it had a strong focus on concrete policy recommendations and often involved contract research that was financed through external funding. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, research at the institute branched out in different directions to include economic-technological, chemical-toxological and social-scientific topics.

'Going green' and 'the environment' also remained on the agenda in a broader sense within the university. Rector Magnificus Egbert Boeker, a physicist who specialised in environmental physics, delivered his rectorial address in 1993 titled 'The Earth and its fullness: on the environment and society', in which he emphasised the importance of technical and political analyses while encouraging broader reflection on mankind's attitude towards nature. The latter deserved attention at VU Amsterdam in particular. Boeker cited the thesis of American historian Lynn White, who claimed that the environmental crisis had its roots in Western Christianity, in which man is seen as the ruler of nature and nature as a machine. However, the religious tradition also had another side, which inspired mankind to care for creation.

Boeker additionally mentioned Abraham Kuyper's social criticism and the idea of environmental stewardship developed by VU economist Bob Goudzwaard and others. Although VU researchers were still contributing (too) little to the international debate, the VU tradition certainly provided avenues to get involved. This appeal from 1993 still seems relevant, especially now that sustainability is one of VU Amsterdam's profile themes.



▲ The campus of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2019, with the campus square, NU.VU Building, OZW Building, Main Building and in the background the high-rise buildings of Zuidas. The NU.VU Building in front has a 'green roof' designed to buffer rainwater, among other things.

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# VU Objects and their Stories

140 years of heritage at [Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#)

Ab Flipse

Liselotte Neervoort

This book tells the 140-year history of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam through 28 objects. For each five years in the university's history, we have selected an object from the VU heritage collections that is characteristic of this period because it originates from this era or because it is associated with an important contemporary event. Various guest authors reflect on the significance the object has today. Thus, heritage is made to serve as a bridge between the past and the present, creating an opportunity for reflection on how to relate to this past.

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